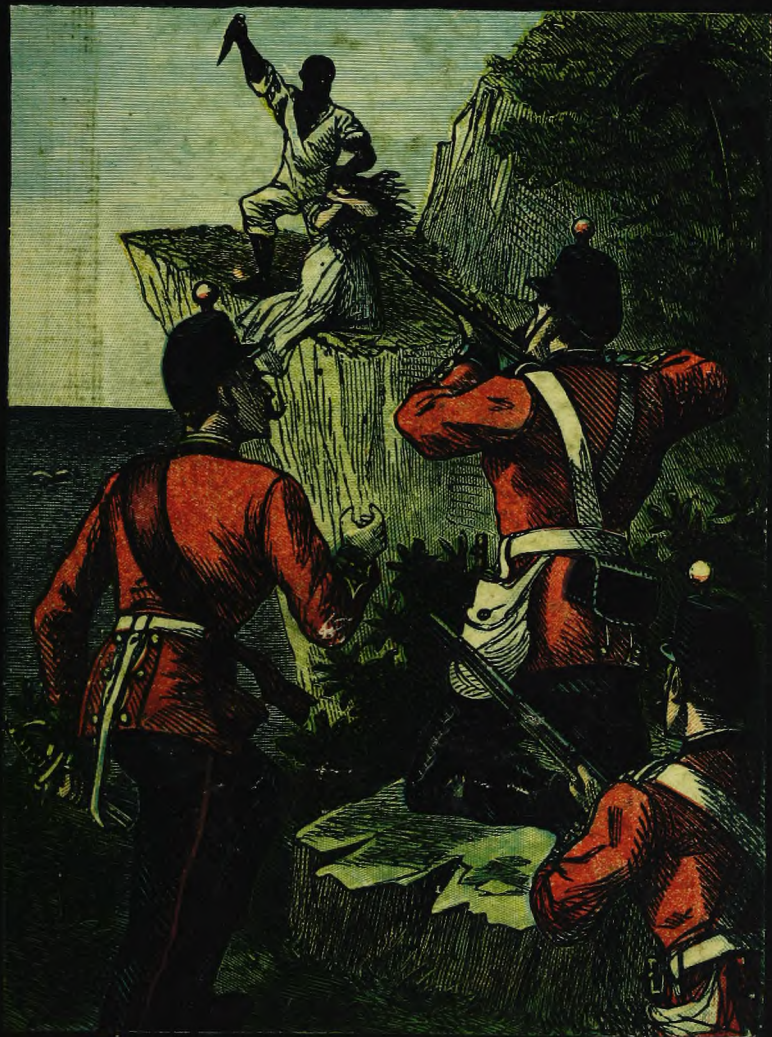


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VERE OF OURS,

THE EIGHTH OF KING'S.



CHAPTER I.

IN THE LINES OF THE FIRST BRIGADE.

HALF-PAST nine at Aldershot on a dull January evening.

From Gun Hill the twenty-four-pounder had pealed its warning boom away over the far-stretching lines of huts which comprise the Infantry Camp, and farther away over the desolate wastes of swamp and heath that lie in the direction of Crookham, Fleet, and Farnham.

In the wretched little wooden-walled and felt-roofed hut wherein they chummed, within their regimental lines, Herbert Vere and Kyrle Desborough, having quitted the mess betimes, were idling and talking over certain affairs of their own, particularly those of the former, through the pleasant medium of a box of cigars with brandy-and-water. Both the friends were in the flush of spirit and life, though Desborough, the captain, was five years the senior of Vere his subaltern, and both were handsome young men, fully aware of the fact that they were so, and also fully possessing that which a writer describes as 'the unsought self-possession which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world'

Above the middle height, Herbert Vere had a face and figure on which the appreciative eyes of more than his mother had rested with regard and admiration ; and though every muscle was well developed by the use of the bat, the oar, and the saddle, he was slender, and looked still more so in his mess-jacket laced with gold and faced with blue. With a small and closely-shorn head, compact and intellectual in contour, his features were delicately cut, and, like those of his chum Desborough, well browned by exposure in the famous Hampshire camp, where drill and other out-of-door exercises are incessant. Closely shaven, all save the dark moustache that concealed his short upper lip, he had a curved nostril, and much of resolution in a frequently-knitted brow that betokened pride, perhaps disappointment, and strong feelings and passions unsubdued.

With a brighter expression of face, and evidently of a lighter temperament, Captain Desborough had, like Vere, all the air of a linesman, but also that of a well-bred and well-born one. His trim and shapely figure was well set up ; his handsome bronzed face, with clear dark-grey Irish eyes ; his jetty hair closely shorn and carefully parted ; the easy sit of his full uniform (for he was on duty), his faultlessly-fitting gloves, and heavy dark-brown moustache, were voted by the ladies to be perfect ; while a general air and expression of self-assured confidence and imperturbable good-humour, and of being perfectly equal to any occasion that might present itself, were the leading characteristics of Kyrle Desborough, who was now lounging back on a hard Windsor chair, and, with his heels planted on an overland trunk, was idly watching the concentric rings that curled from his havannah towards the dingy ceiling of their hut, an edifice which, despite the commanding R. E., was now at all times either wind- or water-tight.

‘Such a bore,’ said he, after a pause, ‘that the untimely frost stopped the hunting this morning just when the covert-hacks came after parade too ; so instead of having a jolly rush across country we’ve been reduced to dawdling at the

club, and studying the Queen's Regulations or the divisional orders—both about as lively as *Bradshaw*. We got rid of drill on the common, however, as the rain that followed converted it, as usual, into a morass of black mud.'

'The frost was scarcely untimely in the first days of January,' observed Vere; 'but it stopped more than the hunting—my expected meeting with—you know whom.'

'Gertrude Templeton.'

'Yes; the ladies were to drive to Minneley to see the hounds throw off.'

'But their ball at Ringwood to-morrow night may make amends for your disappointment.'

'I hope so; yet I greatly missed her this morning. How that girl sits her horse!' exclaimed Vere, as he prepared another cigar, with great energy.

'Yes; between Prince's Gate and Hyde Park Corner, even in the most crowded day of the season, a more graceful or lovely rider will seldom be seen; but——'

Vere's eyes sparkled at the warm approval of his choice expressed by his friend, and then said:

'But what? Come, Kyrle, I don't like *buts*.'

'No more do I.'

'Then what did you mean to say?'

'Only that the mess-cook put too much cayenne pepper in the red-devil, and not enough of oil in the *sauce tartare* with the 'fish to-day,' replied Desborough, still eyeing the concentric rings intently.

'Now, Kyrle, don't be a humbug,' exclaimed Vere, not with anger, but with animation; 'that was *not* what you were about to say!'

'You know what Adam wished for in the Garden of Eden?' asked Desborough, with an evasive kind of tone and a laugh.

'A helpmate; yes.'

'Well, but even with the Honourable Gertrude you could not make an Eden of her Majesty's camp at Aldershot, though section 10 of the divisional orders does make special reference to the "flowers and standard roses."''

‘Now don’t chaff, Kyrle. I should not think of such a thing, but would send in my papers—that is, if all goes well and on the square with me and my uncle, Sir Joseph. Yet I suspect your “but” referred to something else.’

‘Before the late London season was over?’

‘Yes,’ said Vere impatiently.

‘Well, old friend, perhaps it did. The season has ended, of course, in many losses and disappointments——’

‘Barely yet to me,’ urged Vere earnestly, with all his assumed coolness finding that his fresh cigar required much care and management, and much hard puffing, to make it work properly.

‘But doubtless to thousands, if that is any consolation.’

‘By Jove, Kyrle, I don’t quite understand you!’ said Vere, shading his dark eyes, and sharply scanning his friend by the light of the table-lamp. ‘You have some *arrière-pensée*—what is it?’

‘Well,’ resumed Desborough, who, not being in love, and not believing much, perhaps, in such an emotion, usually adopted a tone of banter in reference to what he termed ‘the same old game,’ ‘you know I spent three days last week in town—that “great mart, where souls are exchanged for gold, and hearts are regarded as less valuable than stock.” I was doing Regent Street and Bond Street with my pretty cousins, and learning the expense of keeping a wife——’

‘Do stop this banter, Kyrle,’ said Vere, throwing down his cigar petulantly, ‘and say what you *have* to say.’

‘Well, old fellow, excuse me; I was, indeed, loth to say what I heard; but it was something about Gertrude Templeton.’

‘And this something?’ demanded Vere, with lips that became compressed.

‘Was her engagement—let us call it alleged engagement.’

‘And your authority, Desborough?’ asked the other, in a low but concentrated tone.

‘Big Jocelyn Derinzy of the Guards.’

‘The tall idiot who is here on the divisional staff?’

‘Yes ; he has been allowing it to be distinctly inferred, by admissions at his club and at the Senior, that she is engaged.’

‘To whom?’

‘Himself.’

‘Can the man be such an utter snob?’

Kyrle Desborough could see that Vere’s moustache seemed to bristle and quiver, though his lips were tightly compressed ; that his brow had grown darker as he listened ; and that when he spoke there came into his voice a dry and hard tone which told of intense feeling and strong passions, barely repressed by good breeding and the power of will.

‘Excuse me in telling you this ; but, my dear fellow, how do *you* stand with the lady herself?’

‘I scarcely know,’ replied Vere gloomily, and applying himself to the brandy-and-water.

‘Well, don’t wear your heart on your sleeve for daws to peck at. Even her eldest sister Maud has said something of this matter to my cousins ; and we must not forget that Derinzy is next heir to the viscount his grandfather.’

‘Maud is cold and hard and proud.’

‘Yes, and she must be a mild thirty now. I don’t think she ever was younger—seems never to have been a girl ; yet, by Jove, she is handsome still !—a Templeton of Ringwood couldn’t be otherwise. Her two sisters are so much younger, that there must have been a ten years’ gap in the family—deaths, perhaps, as Gertrude is twenty and Rosamund just eighteen ; so say *Burke* and *Debrett*.’

‘Lady Templeton’s stud-book,’ said Vere bitterly. ‘By carrying her tuft-hunting schemes too far she entangled a young earl in his minority for Maud—at least so Toby Finch of ours told me ; but guardians interfered, and Maud’s prospects have been marred ever since ; hence she has become bitter as a salted olive now. Ah, Kyrle, had I a fortune such as you possess, with what confidence it would inspire me !’

‘And such transcendent merit it would give you in the dowager’s eyes. So the world wags ! But you have expectations, Vere—every fellow has.’

‘Expectations ? True ; my uncle, Sir Joseph, is good and kind to me ; I may be his heir to all, but cannot say.’

‘Is not the old gentleman ill ?’ asked Desborough encouragingly.

‘Yes, nigh unto death.’

‘Where ?’

‘At Mentone.’

‘And you don’t know how his will stands ?’

‘Don’t know even that he has made one ; but I have written to his agents for some possible information.’

‘And you have never spoken distinctly to Gertrude, with all your opportunities ?’

‘No ; my position with her mother seems so hopeless. Why the deuce did she ask me, six weeks ago, to this affair at Ringwood Hall to-morrow night ?’

‘Because, six weeks ago, ere she left town for Hants, matters had not taken so decided a turn. For one opportunity in town you have had ten here, and your attentions to Gertrude have since been undeniable. There was the general’s fancy dress calico-ball ; and then, at the last game of polo in the park close by, a mole might have seen how matters stood, and certainly the fair Maud did.’

‘Her eyes are everywhere.’

‘On the admirers of her sisters, at all events.’

‘How can you be so insensible to the attractions of Rosamund ?’ asked Vere, after a pause, during which they had smoked and sipped for some time in silence.

Desborough laughed at the question, and though totally devoid of vanity, said :

‘Do you really think the little girl is fond of me ?’

‘Yes ; it is painfully, foolishly palpable.’

‘Now, Vere, I am a modest fellow, and cannot think so ; at least, I was once——’

‘Until your lady-worshippers robbed you of the virtue.’

‘Nay, but as I have not a coronet, and see how you stand with Mère Templeton, I am studiously indifferent to the attractions of her youngest born,’ replied the handsome but heedless fellow, laughing at some conceit of his own, and displaying a row of teeth a belle might envy.

‘It is patent—perhaps too absurdly patent, particularly to her sisters—how that girl loves you,’ urged Vere; ‘hence your invitation-card for to-morrow is a puzzle to me.’

‘Well?’ said the other, toying with his moustache and laughing, as if the idea amused him.

‘Would you not like such a girl for a wife?’

‘None more creditable, even in London; but I should prefer her for a sister or sister-in-law; but as for a wife, with that noble thunder-cloud Lady Templeton for a mother-in-law, I would rather be excused. Besides, after your little experiences, I have not the courage to come forward.’

Desborough could then little foresee where and how the secret regard he laughed at was to end.

‘But can it be credible,’ he said, ‘what I heard in town, that the horrible old woman (excuse my calling your proposed relative by such a term) means, *bon gré mal gré*, to marry that blooming young girl to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle?’

‘Who is he?’

‘Baronet of Winklestoke—a venerable duffer, who was much on the staff of the family in town.’

‘I have barely heard of him.’

‘Well, the old fellow—he is sixty if he is a day—was an admirer of Lady Templeton’s long ago.’

‘How long?’

‘Don’t know; long before flint-locks went out of fashion; and now she wishes to secure him for Rosamund. Toby Finch was cover-shooting at his place in Bucks, and says his *cuisine* is conducted after the most approved recipes of Lucullus, Soyer, and Meg Dods; that his cellar and stud are perfect, yet he neither drinks nor rides. Now, Vere, one half of this world knows not how the other lives, and how often apparent wealth may be poverty, and apparent grandeur mere sham;

but I know this, that of the late Lord Templeton's boasted timber nothing remains but the tenants.'

'The tenants?'

'Yes, the rooks; but the timber has gone to the children of Israel; and you may see the rooks looking in vain for the old chase under which the first Lord Templeton rode from Ringwood to fight for the king at Edgehill. Thus I should not wonder but the present dowager may be up to the eyes in debt. Else whence this rampant desire for rich and titled—rich, most certainly—sons-in-law?'

'Be all that as it may, at the ball to-morrow night, despite the rumour of the clubs, I shall certainly put my fate with Gertrude to the issue.'

'And perhaps the mess of the Eighth will lose the best fellow that ever put legs under its mahogany.'

'I have trifled with myself—perhaps with her—too long,' said Vere, unheeding his friend's complimentary remark.

'And you think to take arms against a sea of troubles, and end them?'

'Yes, by Jove!'

'I don't think you will, old fellow.'

'Why?' asked Vere sharply.

'La Mère Templeton is too wide-awake to afford you a chance, though the conservatories *are* spacious; moreover, a dance is an awkward event amid which to come to a complete understanding, especially with—with——'

'What?'

'So active a staff-officer as Derinzy in attendance.'

Vere muttered something bitter under his moustache.

'Past two!' said his friend, rising, and assuming his cap, sword, and belt, selecting a last cigar, and buttoning up his grey overcoat; 'and now I must be off like a bird.'

'Why this hurry?'

'Because, old boy, I'm captain of the day, and have to visit the brigade guard before turning in. So ta-ta, and keep up your courage at the ball.'

CHAPTER II.

VERE'S RESOLVE.

THERE was, perhaps, no man in the whole regiment for whom Vere of ours had a greater regard or friendship than Kyrle Desborough; yet much that the latter had said, and the happy-go-lucky, free-and-easy way in which he had spoken of matters near and dear to the heart of Vere, left him full of thoughts that were angry, bitter, and dubious.

Vere had contrived to give full swing to a *grande passion*, conceived and matured while idling on leave in town, and now had fallen more hopelessly 'over head and ears' therein, at Aldershot, where certainly time is not permitted to hang heavy on one's hands, particularly if one happens to be of subaltern rank.

Vere sat immersed in thought, while the light of his shaded lamp sank low, and became gradually eclipsed by that of the moon. The vast camp was sunk in perfect silence now; even the voices and laughter of some who had lingered in an adjacent mess-hut and the click of their billiard balls had passed away. Beyond the camp—now the Alma Mater of the British soldier—beyond the stately barracks that abut upon the little brick town, away over the verandahs of the club-house, over Redan Hill, Cove Common, the slopes of the Long Valley, and those green pastures which in the past summer had been white with the tents of thousands of Linesmen, Militia, and Volunteers, the fleecy clouds were rolling through a serene and moonlit sky before a soft west wind, throwing alternate light and shadow over the wild and heathy country that stretches away towards the north, tufted with willow, gorse, dwarf trees, and stern Scottish firs.

The calmness of the time, and the crisis that seemed to approach in his love-affair, induced reverie, and Herbert Vere thought deeply.

Gertrude Templeton—the reader has to be introduced to

her yet—and he had met frequently in London, at those places where, as the phrase is, ‘everybody meets everybody’; often, through Desborough, he had obtained a card to a brilliant garden-party given by the dowager her mother—such a party as can be seen in London only.

One of three sisters, all wonderfully handsome, she was singularly attractive in manner and bearing, and without exertion, and perhaps without intention, completely won the heart of Vere, who, though aware that he was not without rivals for her notice, had one particular bugbear, the Colonel Derinzy mentioned by his friend. Times there had been when he felt certain that he was not indifferent to her—perhaps that she loved him in return—as a hundred ‘trifles light as air’ seemed to indicate. At others her tone and manner were constrained—even cold—to him; but when puzzled, piqued, or grieved by this, he knew nothing of the home influences that were brought to bear upon her, though Desborough did, and had now overnight given him some inkling of the tuft-hunting and match-making proclivities of Lady Templeton.

Gertrude by nature was soft, affectionate, pliable, and too yielding; while Maud, her sister, taller in stature, maturer in years, was cold, unsympathetic, sinister, and cynical; and Rosamund, the youngest, a charming girl in her first season—of whom more anon—was what the irreverent Kyrle Desborough denominated ‘a gusher.’

There is a certain honest pride—shall I call it so?—which should animate every human being; and of all others in this world a poor gentleman—comparatively Vere was one—feels this emotion in the keenest degree; and the more he came in contact with the Templetons, the more, by some undefinable tone she adopted, did their mother make him feel that, though he moved in the same circle, there was a gulf between him and her daughter; and, for a woman of undoubted rank and position, she was absurdly vain of her title as Lady Templeton of Ringwood, taken from a place of that name on the Avon, in Hants, but in which the family had no territorial

interest, as Ringwood Hall, a magnificent mansion, stood in quite another part of the county.

Despite those barriers to which he could not shut his eyes, Vere loved Gertrude with a passion all the deeper for the opposition it was likely to excite, unless old Sir Joseph came to his aid. Father Lacordaire has said that every man has three guardian angels—his mother, his wife, and his daughter. Now Vere had none of these, but one, unthought of by the great Dominican, in the person of Gertrude Templeton ; and the soft illusion of his love for her kept his heart pure, and himself out of a hundred scrapes and toils that other sub-alterns of his age were so often entangled by, and in some instances lured to their ruin.

His great love for her, moreover, took a practical turn. In the vague hope of being more able to win her, aware that now in the service, the chief road to highest promotion lies through a course of instruction at the Staff College, despite the allurements of dances, meets, polo, and other parties, where he might see her—despite the amusements of hunting and shooting, and so forth—he had duly performed that course, and won after his name the enigmatic letters *p.s.c.* in the *Army List*; and was willing even to quit the regiment, which had been so long his happy home, and with which all his other wishes and hopes were garnered up. And hard indeed had he worked ; for, as a writer says, ‘a candidate for a staff appointment is expected to be an accomplished linguist, to be well read in English literature, to be a skilled tactician, and to have Hamley and Jomini at his finger ends.’

All this he had done with singular industry, yet with the solid enough conviction now that it did not advance his interests one iota with my Lady Templeton of Ringwood ; for, as Desborough, who knew the family well, assured him, their means, though ample, were only moderate for their rank in the peerage, as all, or nearly all, after her jointure and a slender allowance to her daughters, was reserved for the young lord then at Eton ; and hence it was a *sine quâ non*

that her three daughters should meet with most eligible parties only, and that in her eyes small means, or what she rather deemed them, poverty, were quite an eighth deadly sin.

Of late in their intercourse, amid the chances afforded by society, Vere had been painfully sensible that the old lady simply tolerated him, and doubtless would have hailed with joy an order which sent the Eighth or King's to Cape Coast, or to beat up the quarters of his Majesty of Dahomey ; and that her manner was very different to Derinzy and others of 'her set ;' different indeed from the tone of polite indifference, and almost condescending familiarity, which she and (as some one has it) such denizens of Vanity Fair can at times adopt to those whose position is less assured, or whose fortunes are small. Yet he bore and endured it for the sake of Gertrude, though his naturally proud spirit resented it fiercely in secret.

Gertrude, we have said, was beautiful—ay, beautiful enough to be the heroine of any romance ; but she possessed much that proves better than any beauty—purity and sweetness of character, with great goodness of heart, an even mind, and well-balanced temper ; she was, however, unfortunately too facile, too unresolved in purpose, and too much under the iron control of her ambitious mother.

Vere had begun to see and to know all this, and to dread the sequel, and almost to envy the easy indifference with which Kyrle Desborough viewed the ill-concealed preference of Rosamund for himself.

The alleged club rumours stung Vere deeply ; for, aware that Colonel Derinzy had the full countenance of Lady Templeton, that *insouciant* personage was calm, quiet, assured, and deliberate in his rivalry of Vere, as the latter had felt on more than one occasion ; and he detested this *blasé* Guardsman, the staff colonel, as much as his honest and generous nature was capable of detesting any one, and the sentiment marred sadly the illusions that love had begun to shed over his waking hours. 'If,' says Washington Irving

—‘and of this there is no doubt, for wise men have said it— if life is but a dream, happy is he who can make the most of the illusion.’

But Vere failed to do this with either his life or his love now.

‘By this hour to-morrow,’ thought he, ‘my doubts as to how I stand with Gertrude will have ended, for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy. But her mother ! Never can I hope, save through her means, to succeed with *her*. Yet, though Gertrude may never be mine, it will be something at least to hear that she loves me, and to think sweetly over all that *might* have been. That once achieved, I shall commit the rest to Fate !’

Then something like a malediction escaped him, as he remembered that Kyrle Desborough had openly hinted of the supervision to which his attentions might be subjected on the morrow.

Till he had ascertained that Ringwood Hall was not far from Aldershot, Vere had looked forward with genuine disgust to being stationed in that camp (though it is alleged that all the phases of a soldier’s life may be seen there, and that of all places it is the best to prepare the soldier for grimmer work ; but that remains to be seen), situated amid a dreary district, so wet and swampy in winter, so dry and dusty in summer ; and certainly it is not a place that the rank and file doat on, as, besides drills and duties, they have so much hard work to do, in the way of road-making and camp-cleaning, that they are ever in debt for destroyed uniforms, while the brigade guard-rooms, often crowded by thirty or forty noisy prisoners, are the horror of a quiet recruit.

Eight months had elapsed since Vere’s battalion had marched in, to replace the Pompadours ; and the aspect of the camp, with its lines of wooden huts, all lettered and numbered, painted red, with black-felt roofs, and cook-houses of zinc at intervals ; the movable fire-screens on wheels at the guard-houses, the whole place generally, when seen under the glare of a July sun, was strange and most un-English—

all the more so that in the distance lay the hills of Farnborough, covered with heath and clumps of red-stemmed Scottish pines. But most miserable is the aspect of the Lines when viewed amid the fog and rain or the sleet and snow of winter.

Since then he had gone through all the usual career of hard duty, the weary sham-fighting, in the knee-deep silver dust of the Long Valley, which turns even rifle uniforms white, the skirmishing amid the golden gorse and purple heather, varied by duck-shooting and boating on Fleet Pond, balls at the club-room, a ride with the hounds, polo and cricket; but more than all by a run up to town (when he could get Finch or Desborough to take his duties), during which it went hard with him if he did not contrive in the Row, or somewhere else, to meet with Gertrude Templeton, but quite as often to encounter Derinzy with her and her sisters; and often too he had the bitterness of leaving that formidable rival quite in possession of the field.

Selecting from his dressing-case a valuable diamond ring that had once been his mother's, and which as such he highly prized, he resolved to cast all upon the hazard of the die, and, however Sir Joseph's will might stand, to leave the mystic hoop on *the* particular finger of Gertrude to-morrow.

But what if, with his many opportunities, the inevitable colonel had anticipated him in this? He thrust the thought aside, and strove to think of other things

CHAPTER III.

AT RINGWOOD HALL.

ON this night, which was to be so full of interest to Vere, brightly shone the moonlight on the lozenged and heraldically painted glass of the mullioned oriels of Ringwood Hall, on the acute gables and clustered chimney-stacks of the early Stuart days, and on the walls, which in summer were always

covered with masses of clematis and Virginia creepers, hop and jasmine. In the foreground were the shrubberies of Portugal laurels, bays green and spotted, mingled with dwarf pine, cypress, and many a coming flower, the pride of the heart of the gardener, old Davis Dibble ; and notwithstanding what Kyrle Desborough said concerning the old lord's timber, wood in plenty shaded the park of Ringwood Hall and the long stately avenue that led thereto ; hence, if the dowager were in monetary troubles, signs of it were no more apparent here than at her mansion in Belgravia.

And through the mullions shone countless lines of many coloured light, as all the house was *en fête* to-night, and many guests were expected.

One of the chief seats in the county, statists and artists had described it again and again on paper and canvas : its beautiful staircase, with a magnificent flight of four landings, all carved and ornamented in good old British oak, that might have been in leaf when Cerdic the Saxon was King of Wessex ; its picture-gallery, with portraits by Lely, Kneller, and Vandyke, Zuccherro and Reynolds, depicting some grave and quaint Templetons of other times ; its library, full of curious books, not to be found elsewhere, 'out of print, in fact,' as Kyrle Desborough alleged, 'because they wouldn't be worth reprinting ;' the relics of the feudal days scattered all over the house ; its gardens and vineyards that were famous in the days of Evelyn and Pepys ; while in the avenue were two grand and stupendous old trees, grey with age, vast in girth, and with the antiquity of unknown years, called King James's oaks—so called for there, when Duke of York and Albany, he had tarried to have a cup of sack with the fourth Lord Templeton, when *en route* to Portsmouth to take command of the English fleet and 'have it out with the Dutch.'

Ringwood Hall was certainly, as a habitation, somewhat the antipodes of a hut in the lines of the First Brigade, and so thought Herbert Vere, as with Desborough he drove up the avenue to the balustraded terrace, from the gravelled

plateau of which flights of white steps descended to the garden.

We have said that times there were when he had felt certain—or all but certain—that he was far from indifferent to Gertrude Templeton, and that with her the warmest esteem and friendship had become insensibly blended with emotions more sweet and tender, and that certain trifling yet momentous indications had been given him of this ; yet, despite these, and despite his hopes in his kinsman, old Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, he felt his courage sinking fast, and lower would it have fallen could he have known all that was then passing among some of the ladies of the family.

So prior to the arrival of other guests we will take a peep indoors.

Gertrude, like her sisters, was in her charming dressing-room, arraying herself for conquest, with the assistance of her maid (till she was joined by busy bustling little Rosamund), who had her rich dress and jewels all ready for use, and many of the latter were family heirlooms, only worn on special occasions. The former in hue, with all its rich white lace, became her beauty : her hair was dark brown, with a natural ripple ; her skin was snowy, and her features clearly cut and regular ; while her eyes of violet-blue, though ever soft and sometimes shy, had usually a clear, bright, straightforward expression, that was very winning ; and when she smiled, the smile began in her eyes ere it reached her firm pouting lips. Her nose was perhaps too small, yet perfect in form ; and she was not without her faults of character, as we shall show—what girl who knows she is pretty is ever without them?—and Gertrude Templeton had perhaps quite as many as some girls.

She was a daughter of a proud race, and, like her sister Maud, she looked it, yet all unconsciously ; she had a figure of perfect symmetry, a queenly bearing in her twentieth year, a sweet grace of motion, and a certain ladylike dignity that never deserted her.

‘You may go now, Phyllis,’ said she to her maid, when the

last diamond bracelet had been clasped on her white rounded arm ; and she took up her jewelled fan, her laced handkerchief, and bouquet of the rarest flowers that old Davis Dibble could cull for her, and, giving a last glance at herself in the pier-glass, saw reflected there a picture of girlish loveliness, combined with womanly beauty not often equalled ; and then she stood for some minutes lost in thought.

Herbert Vere was coming. With every jewel she had placed upon her arms, round her slender neck, and amid the masses of her elaborately-dressed hair, she repeated this to herself ; but too well she knew her mother's wishes, for they were openly avowed. Great moral courage was, perhaps, not one of the attributes of the gentle Gertrude, and when an evil she dreaded, like this *affaire* with Derinzy, was not a proximate one, or at least deferable, she trusted to chance to avert it altogether, or somehow change her fate.

The gold-mounted and elaborately-cut crystal bottles reposing in the blue-velvet trays of a beautifully-jewelled dressing-case had been a Christmas gift from Jocelyn Derinzy, and, as her eyes wandered over it, she thought how would Herbert Vere, poor fellow, have viewed her acceptance thereof from his rival.

But her mother had impetuously forced it upon her ; and on the fact as it stood, the colonel, naturally vain enough, based some high ulterior hopes indeed.

It is difficult to say precisely what was passing in the heart of the girl. She knew, of course, as we have said, that Vere was coming to-night ; more than that, she knew that he loved her, and the desire to shine before him grew coquettishly strong in her heart ; yet, knowing Lady Templeton as she did, she dared not acknowledge to herself any other motive or desire, or any other hope.

She sighed and was about to leave the room, when two slender snowy arms were gently placed round her neck—so gently as not to ruffle her array—and her bright and happy little sister, a beautiful blonde, with shining golden hair, and laughing eyes of violet-blue, with dark eyebrows and darker

lashes, a girl who possessed high spirits without the requisite amount of judgment to balance them, kissed Gertrude again and again, and began to 'talk confidence' as she phrased it.

'O you silly impulsive little thing !' said Gertrude, readjusting her diamond necklace, which had been displaced.

'Little ! I am quite as tall as you, Gervy, and Captain Desborough told me so,' replied the girl, pouting, yet with one of her brightest smiles ; for she also had but one thought that night, while arraying herself in an adjoining room : '*He* will be here, and will see how others can, and do, admire me !' 'Now, dearest, you look charming, but do you admire me?'

'You look like a veritable queen of the fairies in your blue and lace—it so suits your fair complexion.'

'See, dear old Dibble has got me some lily-of-the-valley and stephanotis for my bouquet.'

'Why stephanotis, Rosamund?'

'Desborough likes the perfume.'

'Always Desborough. I own he is dangerously handsome and taking in manner ; but don't let Maud or mamma hear you speak of him.'

'Yet he comes to-night !' urged Rosamund earnestly.

'That matters little—mamma wished for the band of the Eighth.'

The lip of Rosamund curled—the 'fair Rosamund' she was frequently called—for pride that was unintentional mingled with the beauty of both the younger Templetons ; and in silence she slightly drew up her dress, as she placed for warmth upon the fender a pretty foot, in a slipper so small and faultless that Cinderella might have worn it at the royal ball, while Gertrude looked lovingly at her, and approvingly too.

Rosamund was in all the bloom, freshness, glory, and happiness of the *first season*. Gertrude had seen three in town, and she could recall her simplicity, her little blunders, that were to others sweet and attractive ; her charming *naïveté*, which all men said was peculiarly her own ; and she could

remember how soon all this passed away ! How the thrill at the opera, the little flirty meetings at the Royal Academy, the open-eyed wonder at the theatre, were ere long followed by languor and listlessness ; how the anticipated joy of the ball-room became replaced—from its very iteration—by weariness and *ennui* ; and how even the daily ride in the Row, or a drive through the noblest park in the world, became only an unexhilarating bore, till—till that sunny garden-party, at which she first met a man so different from those all about her—Herbert Vere, to whose decided preference for herself, a piquancy was now given by the spirit of opposition with which her mother had viewed it, since the family came to Ringwood Hall at the close of the season.

‘Well,’ said Rosamund, adjusting the last button of a glove, ‘the night of the ball has come now ; all the important and irritating consultations as to who should, and who should not, be invited are long since over (how I detested mamma’s boudoir at that time, Gerty !), and the gloom of the house will now pass away.’

‘Gloom, Rosamund ?’

‘Yes. How scarce visitors have been for weeks past ! Those we invited did not call because we had done so, and those who were not invited have naturally stayed away in a pet, lest it might be supposed they came to fish for cards. But mamma is now in the drawing-room ; let us join her.’

As the sisters passed on, Gertrude, used though she had been from infancy to the stately old house of her ancestors, now all brilliantly lighted up for the *fête*, was struck by its internal aspect, with something of the same hopeless ideas that occurred to Vere when, some time after, he and laughing Kyrle Desborough drove up the avenue in a hired fly from the camp. Warmth, fragrance, and grandeur were every where around her. There were the stately staircase, with its broad steps covered with crimson cloth, its chastened tints and shadowy full-length portraits contrasting with the white statues that upheld lamps on every landing, and the great *jardinières* or majolica vases, that contained rare flowers

which filled the long corridors with their perfume ; the shadowy corridors themselves, with all the feudal relics and statuary ; and the vast double drawing-room, furnished singularly with black ebony inlaid with ivory, the walls covered with blue silk and satin damask, softly floored with a gorgeous carpet, and having old portraits of some determined-looking fellows in half armour, frowning or glancing proudly askance from their antique frames.

From all this, as if by association of ideas, her mind reverted to the comfortless huts in the Infantry Camp, with their red-painted walls, odious roofs, and general air of wigwam-like squalor ; and a shiver, caused by what she could scarcely define, passed over her, especially when she met the cold, inquiring, and yet approving glitter of her mother's eye—approving because she saw her toilette, like that of Rosamund, was perfect on all points.

Still handsome, stately, and even graceful, though past middle age, the perfectly regular face of the dowager was singularly young-looking to have a daughter of the age of the Honourable Maud, and she seemed to possess the valuable faculty of belying her years and never growing older. Her eyes were as bright as when she was sixteen, though doubtless their expression was harder and colder than in those days. The contour of her features was eminently aristocratic, but they were smooth, colourless, and destitute of a single line that was indicative of thought or care, reflection or even kindness of heart. Her face was but a handsome mask, and yet behind it lurked more than, to any casual or even close observer, met the eye : for, with all her apparent wealth, her undoubted position in good society, and her perfectly unruffled bearing and calm, passionless exterior, Lady Templeton was not without her 'skeleton in the house.'

As the two girls entered, their sister Maud was with their mother, and though they would never again celebrate her thirtieth birthday, Maud was armed for conquest too. Her white sloping shoulders and slender throat were perfect in form and colour, and set off by her dress of rose-coloured

silk with white lace, and all her movements were graceful ; but her bearing was haughty ; her pale-grey eyes looked out with a species of serene stateliness upon the world ; her lips had a scornful expression, and too often words of scorn, that bordered on decidedly bad taste, dwelt on them.

She had the reputation of being a quietly-working mischief-maker, and it was alleged that she was never so happy as when, by art, innuendo, or otherwise, she succeeded in detaching a man from a woman he loved or admired, even though she failed to attach him to herself.

Since the failure in 'hooking' the young peer, season after season had passed, and, whether inspired by jealousy or honest emulation, Maud had certainly done her best. But still no sound of marriage bells came to her ears, and she had now, perhaps, ceased to care greatly ; yet she still spoke of herself and her sisters as 'we girls' and was not above studying little airs and graces, rounding her arms—which she knew to be undeniably handsome—while coquettishly arranging a bracelet, or getting a glove buttoned by some man who was not so young as he had been.

Educated as they had been, the three sisters could not fail to have much of their mother's absurd, almost 'snobbish,' pride of birth ; but the two younger had certainly none of her matchless selfishness and hardness of heart, nor had they caught her spirit of match-making, though eligible *partis* were her incessant theme ; and now, prior to the appearance of some guests who were staying with them, she and Maud had been discussing the old topic.

'You are right, Maud,' Gertrude heard her mother say, as she and Rosamund drew near the fireplace ; 'he *is* so poor that I greatly regret having asked him.

Then Gertrude's heart told her that Herbert Vere was referred to, and she pressed her open fan, which was made of the white plumage of some tropical bird, upon her breast to conceal its heaving less from the eyes of her mother than those of Maud.

'Of whom are you talking, mamma ?' asked Rosamund, in all innocence.

‘Of that—of Mr. Vere,’ replied Lady Templeton, with a scarcely perceptible glance at Gertrude.

‘Mr. Vere has more than his pay,’ said Rosamund.

‘I should hope so, child.’

‘He has private means, mamma.’

‘Yes, said Maud ; ‘but so very private that no one knows anything about them.’

‘O Maud—such a tone to adopt !’ urged Rosamund, to whom Gertrude felt intensely grateful ; ‘if Mr. Vere is far from rich, he has good expectations, and has come——’

‘Of poor but respectable parents, like Robinson Crusoe and ever so many other heroes,’ said Lady Templeton.

‘And he occupies a hut like Robinson Crusoe—a hut in the Infantry Camp,’ added Maud, laughing, and showing nearly all her glittering teeth.

‘There is a baronetcy in the family,’ said Lady Templeton ; ‘but ever so many stand between it and him.’

‘So you have been looking in *Debrett*, mamma ?’ asked Gertrude timidly.

‘Yes,’ replied her mother, with a cold, steely glitter in her eyes that was meant for a smile ; ‘though I seldom look among the baronets, for I know no greater sticklers for their rank and precedence than they are, those tiresome little baronets.’

‘Then how comes Sir Ayling Aldwinkle to be your especial favourite, mamma ?’ asked Gertrude pointedly.

‘Think of his enormous wealth, my dear !’

‘Among the “casuals” who are coming here to-night,’ said Maud, in her mocking tone, with a furtive smile at Rosamund, ‘there are Clive, Finch, and Desborough, all of the Eighth——’

‘Finch is only a younger son,’ observed Lady Templeton.

‘And younger sons you deem a mistake in the scheme of Nature, mamma,’ laughed Maud, who saw that Rosamund had changed colour at the name of Desborough. How little could that handsome heedless fellow really know, or perhaps care, that the mere utterance of his name possessed a magic

power to stir her heart ! And yet, as Vere had more than once told him, 'the half of Rosamund's heart was worth the whole of another girl's.'

'The wealth of Desborough might find him favour even with you, mamma,' resumed Maud ; 'but though an admirer, he is barely a dangler, Rosamund, and I fear you are doomed to be an old man's darling, after all.'

'I must trust perhaps to your experience, Maud,' said Rosamund ; 'you are twice as old as I am nearly, and so must be twice as wise ; yet I do hope you may be mistaken, after all.'

Never had the girl spoken so bitterly before, but she felt that her sister referred mockingly to a foregone conclusion. And now the rolling of wheels, the jarring of hoofs on the gravelled terrace without, and certain noises and voices in the hall and great staircase, announced the arrival of guests ; after which the drawing-rooms filled rapidly, and the buzz of insipid commonplaces was heard on all sides.

Now the band of the Eighth was in the vestibule adjoining the dancing-room, and they were preparing for the 'Lucknow Quadrille,' a composition of the bandmaster, and so named from the last achievement on the regimental colours, and the ball in all its brilliance was beginning, while the rooms were fast becoming crowded.

Vere and Desborough entered together, and the first on whom the eyes of the former fell was Gertrude, who, giving place to the guests, declined dancing as yet. With those who were present there is no need to trouble the reader, who may never meet with them again, save one or two exceptions.

As he drew near her, none could have guessed that these two were more to each other than the merest acquaintances or friends ; yet their eyes told tales that each could read in those of the other, and their pulses quickened as their hands met.

With something of royal condescension, Lady Templeton, gave Vere her hand ; then, waving her fan involuntarily, almost as a seeming hint that nothing more was required of her, she turned to address an elderly but fashionable-looking man who was stooping confidentially over her chair—Sir

Ayling Aldwinkle—and of whom we shall hear more anon. If anything could have clouded a man's hopes of the future, it would have been the prospect of such a mother-in-law as Lady Templeton ; but Vere's love for Gertrude was strong and earnest. And yet, with all his knowledge of life and the world, and all his experience thereof, he felt himself speaking huskily as he addressed the girl, and as if his lips were parched, as perhaps they were ; for on the events of that night too probably hung his fate, or what he considered to be such. So, with his mind thus pre-occupied, he found himself gazing into the depths of her dark-blue eyes, and talking the inerest commonplace the while : how unluckily the frost had stopped the hunting ; whether there would be rain to-morrow, and of the weather peculiar to Hants in general, and the vicinity of Aldershot in particular ; the mud of the common, and the dust of the Long Valley.

Yet few men had a greater power of pleasing a woman he admired than Vere, and no man seemed less vain or sensible of that power than he ; and even now, as he spoke, there was in the face of her who listened her own peculiar smile, the nameless and indescribable charm that won the admiration, if not the love, of all who looked on her.

Though occupied with Gertrude, and Gertrude alone, Vere politely strove to insure himself a few dances on Maud's card, which she accorded him graciously enough, as his good dancing and fine figure made him always an acceptable partner ; but, up to the moment he addressed her, Maud, through a tiny eye-glass, had been scanning, with cool and insufferable *insouciance*, many of those guests who had been invited as local notorieties or local necessities, from policy, in connection with the estate, the locality, and the future political interests of the family, but chiefly those, of course, of the young lord her brother.

Vere then approached Rosamund, but her card was full already. Vere could perceive that Kyrle Desborough's name appeared thereon far too often, and he thought that, under all the circumstances, 'it was a downright shame of Kyrle.'

But Rosamund saw not the clouds of the future, and when Desborough addressed her, the girl's heart swelled with happiness and joy.

After securing himself partners with those to whom he was bound by duty or courtesy, Vere again turned to Gertrude, gave his arm, and led her to the other room, as their dance had begun; and aware that the eyes of Maud, of Derinzy, and most assuredly of Lady Templeton, were upon her and Vere, the manner of Gertrude to the latter, even amid the crowded room, was, in spite of herself, painfully constrained, even nervous.

CHAPTER IV.

WAS THE RING ACCEPTED?

As yet Vere had avoided Derinzy, whom he detested for more than being his rival, as their apparent cordiality before strangers was a mere sham, induced by good breeding, and as there had already been 'bad blood' between them on more than one brigade-day during the past summer. 'But,' says some one, 'alas for the shams and deceptions of society! paste-board and tinsel are more real than its hollow-hearted seemings.'

The noble dancing-room, with its elaborately-painted ceiling, every panel of which was decorated with heraldic blazonry, fruits, or flowers, the waxen lights, the perfume of rare exotics in *jardinières* between the draped oriels, the pictures and statuary, barely won a glance from Vere, whose mind was full of her whose hand rested in his, and whose slender waist he clasped as they glided away over the polished floor among the flying waltzers.

In the intoxication of the flying dance and the brilliant yet familiar music of his own regimental band, Herbert Vere half forgot his troubles and fears, but not the joy of having his arm round the floating figure of Gertrude, her hand in his, her breath upon his cheek.

Many of his brother officers were present, and more were coming, as they were in great repute as good round-dancing men, and Desborough had secured the attendance of the band, in obedience to a note from Lady Templeton ; moreover, he was president of the band committee.

His first waltz over with Gertrude, Vere hastened to fulfil an engagement with the terrible Maud, whom he was most solicitous to please, and who, in the intervals of the dance, indulged her spirit of satire or ill-nature, first in quizzing unmercifully a flirtation in an oriel between young Prior of the Eighth and a girl of sixteen—‘two chits that, be they ever so much in love, could not marry for the next ten years ;’ and then an engaged couple, whom she was sure would be bored to death in less than a week.

Another couple, who sat somewhat apart, she informed Vere, had been married for some time ; but the gentleman who was hovering behind the lady’s chair had been her first love, and now sought sedulously to be platonically her third love—but most platonically, of course.

Vere looked with some surprise at the handsome woman who permitted her tongue to run on in this sharp fashion, and regretted that she was a sister of Gertrude ; but now Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, who still indulged in square dances, claimed her for the Lancers, and led her away with a somewhat tremulous hand.

The baronet was a tall, thin old man, with snow-white hair, which he had not the bad taste to attempt to dye. His figure had already begun to droop, but his well-lined face was delicate, refined, and eminently aristocratic ; his nose was high and thin ; his teeth were good, for they were of the newest fashion from Paris ; and his watery grey eyes had still, it was owned, ‘a wicked look’ in them ; for though his chin was pendulous, his shoulders round, and his thin and delicate hands a little shaky, it was still—by mere force of habit perhaps—his desire to be thought rather ‘a sad dog’ yet, and not without designs upon the weaker vessels.

And now Vere had to fill up his time with another partner,

as Gertrude was engaged with his especial *bête noire*, Colonel Jocelyn Derinzy, late of the Guards, now unattached and on the camp divisional staff.

‘How didoo, Vere?’ he lisped, in his most languid and lisping manner, as he led his partner off, and nodded superciliously; ‘hot, isn’t—aw—aw!’

Big Jocelyn, as he was named, was handsome, decidedly fashionable and *distingué* in bearing, with a kind of Life Guardsman look that was undeniable. He was nearly six feet in height; his hair, light brown and thick, was parted faultlessly, like a girl’s, over a lineless forehead, that never was guilty of exhibiting thought or reflection; he had full, dreamy, and yet insipid, blue eyes, a bright, yet ever vapid, smile; a splendid moustache, which was darker than his hair, and sedulously cherished, and under which he showed at times a brilliant set of teeth, that, unlike those of Sir Ayling, were naturally his own; and only that he was too lazy, his chest, shoulders, and limbs would have declared him an athlete.

With all his Guard’s air, in mufti he looked like what he was—less a soldier than a *blasé* indolent man about town, famous for the cut of his coat, the fitting of his spotless gloves, and wonderful boots. Vere and Derinzy felt each other to be rivals and enemies, for the latter had contrived, by a confusion of orders, to ‘make a figure’ of the former lately, during a sham fight in the Long Valley; and in the general bearing of the staff colonel there was a quiet air of property and assumed personal interest in Gertrude that was intensely galling to Vere, as it seemed to corroborate the club rumours; and even when he yielded her up to him, when their dance was over, it was done in a way as if ‘it didn’t matter.’ And after the dance was ended, poor Gertrude, with her mother’s icy and inquiring eyes fixed on her, could only urge feebly to Maud that ‘Herbert Vere was very unlike the men she usually met.’

No exact opportunity had occurred for Vere having the coveted few words apart with Gertrude; and meanwhile

Rosamund, the heedless, youngest, oblivious of mamma and every one, was enjoying herself thoroughly with Desborough, and 'going the pace,' as Toby Finch of ours phrased it.

Kyrle Desborough, in his thirtieth year, seemed almost middle-aged to the *débutante* of eighteen—yet he was the 'god of her idolatry'—and as a schoolboy when compared with Sir Ayling, with whose name Maud would so odiously insist upon coupling hers ; and now, in a pause of the galop, she was listening to an opinion of Kyrle's on something, as she hung flushed and palpitating on his arm, and hanging on his words, eye to eye ; and he did this more than was right under the circumstances, as he simply meant—nothing.

'Why have you not on your medals and the V.C.?' she asked, in a low voice.

'We don't sport these toys in mufti.'

'It is a mistake,' said she, turning aside for a moment.

'Don't play with the poor girl,' whispered Vere.

'What the deuce *can* I do? I should not have come at all,' responded Kyrle, in a low voice, and looking as much as to say, 'Girls in her set have neither hearts to lose nor break.'

'And you won the V.C. at—at—where was it?' asked the bright face, turning again to his.

'Fighting against the hill-tribes in Bengal.'

'How weak you must think me, Captain Desborough, you who have seen so much !'

'Weak?'

'Yes, and—and young lady-like.'

'The latter indeed you are. We can't be all men, unfortunately, but nature could never make another like you.'

Rosamund coloured at words which he would never have addressed to Maud ; but to her Desborough was the *beau idéal* of all that a man and a lover should be. His winning manner, his handsome person, the softness of his dark Irish eyes, and his mellow voice—subdued when addressing all women—his V.C., and the story of how he won it, fighting

against fabulous odds to rescue Toby Finch—made her feel that she was in the presence of a master spirit, who could rule and guide her for good or evil, happiness or misery ; how much, she little foresaw *then* !

Yet Rosamund felt intuitively that he did not love, though he might admire her. Could he but have looked into her heart, and seen how she loved *him* ! She knew that to love thus was forbidden her ; but surely she might have friendship warm and tender, elevated and spiritual ; and so the charming little sophist argued in her heart of hearts, if such a phrase may be permitted.

It did, however, often occur to her that she had surely lost proper pride, feeling, and spirit, to love in secret a man who cared nothing for her ; yet not so secretly either, for Maud could read her thoughts, and by many a quiet but stinging remark could turn her into stone, as it were.

‘There are men who are worth dying for, I have been told,’ she once ventured to urge in reply ; ‘and surely Kyrle Desborough is one of these men ! How strange that he is one of those whom all women love ! and if so, why should I be an exception ?’

‘Don’t be a romantic goose, and don’t fret over your own fancies,’ would be Maud’s cold rejoinder.

And now he was translating for her freely and for his own amusement the Chinese characters on her ivory fan, with a facility that would have startled a Civil Service examiner, till the terms of the pretended love-letter—for such he averred it to be—grew a little *apropos*, and she suddenly said,

‘Please pick up my glove—where is it ?’

‘In my hand. Such an absurdly tiny glove it is ! May I keep it ?’ he whispered.

‘Till to-morrow.’

He took it, and from that moment forgot all about it ; but his arm went round her again, and she whirled away in the waltz with him, her eyes half closed and her whole soul ‘in a dreamy state of uncalculating happiness ;’ while the baronet, senile as he was, and as an old man doting too, had not the

bad taste to hover about the almost unsuspecting girl, or to follow her, save enviously, perhaps angrily, with his wicked old eyes. And yet there were good-natured friends in Ringwood Hall that night, who averred that some of the brilliants then sparkling on the white neck and arms of Rosamund were the gifts of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle—to Lady Templeton, added others, but in past times.

‘I know nothing more absurd,’ Maud heard the baronet say to the latter, as the young lady in question went floating past, ‘nothing indeed, or more insolent in fact, than for a man without—aw—aw—a social position, attempting to engage the affections of one who may—nay, might—engage herself with undoubted advantage and honour to another. Don’t you think so, Lady Templeton?’

‘Think so? of course I do, Sir Ayling.’

Maud knew the drift of these remarks, and smiled one of her own malevolent smiles as the words of a writer occurred to her: ‘Hood-winking is not pleasant, even when performed by a mistress in the art of falconry; but it is still more aggravating to be blindfolded by a mere chit, who ought to be busy with her embroidery-frame, instead of meddling with lures and jesses.’

But there was certainly no effort at hood-winking so far as the happy Rosamund and indifferent Desborough were concerned.

‘How *dare* he?’ was the thought of the haughty Maud, as she watched the half self-satisfied and wholly amused expression and bearing of Desborough towards her thoughtless sister.

This playing at love-making seemed genteel comedy, that might end in melodrama, and irritated her intensely. At last she suddenly missed them from amid the glittering maze of dancers, and still more would she have been irritated had she known all that was passing.

For coolness, they had wandered into the picture-gallery. And now Rosamund’s gloveless hand was in that of Desborough, though it leant upon his arm, and they were talking,

the girl scarcely knew of what, but supposed it was the pictures, as they paused before one, a full-length of a fair and handsome young girl attired richly, but in the studied negligence, the elegant *deshabille*, of the days of Charles II. Her golden hair, adorned by a single rose, escaped from a bandeau of pearls and fell upon a neck of snow.

‘An ancestress, I presume?’ said Desborough.

‘Yes, a few generations back,’ replied Rosamund.

‘You are wonderfully like her.’

‘I would I were half so lovely!’ said Rosamund, looking up with her brightest expression, yet coyly, into the face of Desborough, for this effort of Lely’s pencil was famous for its loveliness; ‘it was she who, when the Duke of York passed this way to Southampton, wearing his buff coat and velvet-covered steel cap (just as he is described by Mr. Pepys), gave his highness a kiss, as a bribe to beat the Dutch; whereat my Lord Templeton was much amazed, as were my Lords Churchill and Sandwich, who stood by.’

‘A kiss! Well, it leaves no mark, externally at least.’

Now Kyrle Desborough was very wrong, and we suppose we must say he was; but ‘mistakes will occur in a hurry and shock;’ and so, somehow, very unjustifiably under all the circumstances, he kissed Rosamund Templeton. Her little mouth was so near, what could he do? The girl trembled and grew pale, but not with anger.

So passed the first—would it be the *last*?—kiss between those lips that might have clung to each other for a lifetime. We shall see.

A few minutes—only three perhaps—were passed in that shady picture-gallery; yet in that brief time were sown seeds that, as they took root, sprouted and budded, bore with them sleepless nights, and days of aching and sorrow, doubt, anger, and perhaps hate!

Meanwhile Vere of ours had recaptured Gertrude, and had the Honourable Maud been less occupied in watching Rosamund and her handsome partner, she might have missed *her* too.

The night was far advanced by this time—even the first hour of morning was nearly past ; the guests were all crowded into the old-fashioned dining-hall, where supper was laid, and these two, for whom somehow there was no space amid the crush around the tables, and who more probably made no effort to find it, took refuge, as if by tacit consent, in the long and half-lit conservatory, which lay between the hall and the now empty dancing-room ; and Vere led his companion to a sofa, in a place where her light dress would be less conspicuous amid the greenery which surrounded her.

Vere was no coxcomb, but as Gertrude seated herself and looked up their eyes met, and he knew that now had come the time so long wished for, and yet so dreaded, though both in that glance felt that the moment was one of those that do not occur often in a lifetime, when the interpretation of the tongue becomes weak as compared with the silent sympathy of the eye ; and through a long time of weary sorrow, separation, and doubt, the glance of that moment was forgotten by neither. ‘If engaged to Derinzy, why does she look at me thus?’ thought Vere ; and with that thought the avowal that trembled on his lips died away. And yet unconsciously she led up to it, by asking :

‘What do those curious letters, *p.s.c.*, after your name in the *Army List*, signify?’

His heart quickened ; she *had* been looking at his name. Then she added :

‘I asked Derinzy, and he made me some jocular answer.’

‘It means, passed the Staff College.’

‘For what—a staff appointment?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where?’

‘Oh, in the Colonies, or anywhere.’

‘Surely you have formed this resolution abruptly.’

‘No, far from it,’ replied Vere, whom her mention of Derinzy’s name had piqued ; and he thought the glance he had read must be fancy, as her eye was calm and steady now, though her white bosom heaved under the fan which she pressed against it.

‘Are you likely to go soon?’ she asked quietly.

‘I cannot say.’

‘How much we shall miss you!’

‘Oh, my place may be easily filled.’

She looked up at him reproachfully, and then cast down her eyes sadly. He could not see the latter expression, but felt that the conversation had taken a turn he did not intend, in tone at least. With some quickness, it might be irritation, of manner she drew the gloves off her hands—white, delicate, and faultless hands they were, that told alike of birth and culture.

She had rings on both hands, but none whatever on the engaged finger—the third of the right hand—and hence, by ‘the laws of the ring,’ Vere saw that she was *not* engaged, and that the rumour of the clubs was false. And now indeed he felt that the time had come. ‘Probably there is no instance,’ says Sir Arthur Helps, ‘in which two lovers have made love in exactly the same way as any other two lovers since the world began.’ But it all comes to the same thing in the end.

She seemed intuitively to know what was coming now, for as he took her hand between his own she permitted him to retain it, as if there were that magnetism or delight in the touch which a writer has described as being ‘like a pulse in the soul.’ She grew paler and paler, whiter and whiter, till the dark-brown hair seemed to deepen in its hue by very contrast.

Leaning over her till his moustache almost touched the close white division of the parted hair on her graceful head, he told her rapidly, hurriedly, and in broken sentences, that he loved her, that the dearest wish of his heart was to call her his own—that his passion for her had in it an intensity of which he had not believed himself capable, but that he dreaded the opposition of her family; and, that romance might not be without the practical, he added that all his hopes for the future—and they were many—were based upon the will and intentions of his uncle, Sir Joseph Vere, at Mentone.

To all this she made no reply ; but remained with down-cast face, her white bosom palpitating painfully, and her little hands trembling as if palsied.

‘Speak to me,’ he whispered imploringly, ‘only one word.’

Still the girl, usually so self-asserted, or rather self-possessed, was calm, though apparently much agitated ; and Vere eyed her with an anxious and loving, yet almost haggard, expression, as he said :

‘I see it is in vain that I have urged all this ; your studied silence tells me that I have been presumptuous—’

‘Oh, no—no—no !’ she exclaimed, in a hushed voice.

‘That I am without hope, then ?’

‘I have not said so.’

‘But you think it ?’

‘You are unjust to say so,’ she continued, in a broken voice. ‘You do me a great honour, Mr. Vere—a girl is always honoured by such an offer ; I always thought you preferred me to others—were very fond of me indeed—but that you loved me——’

‘My eyes have ever told you so ; and now you know that I love you dearly and deeply, dearest Gertrude, tell me, may I hope ?’

Never before had he called her by her Christian name. In doing so he passed the Rubicon of friendship altogether, and it sounded sweetly to himself and to the girl, whose agitation pained and, for a time, perplexed him.

‘May I hope, Gertrude ?’ he urged, with one arm round her now ; ‘tell me—tell me—ere fools interrupt——’

‘Not to-night—another time.’

As her eyes met his, he saw that they were full of tears. She gave a kind of gasp as his hand tightened on her waist, and making an effort to be calm, said, in a low voice :

‘When I say to you that I am a victim to the most odious tyranny, I admit more than I have ever done to mortal man.’

‘Tyranny !’

‘Let us understand each other. Mamma—ah, you don’t know mamma as I do ; she wields her power over Rosamund

on behalf of Sir Ayling, and over me as regards the attentions of Colonel Derinzy.'

'Rosamund will never yield?'

'I think not.'

'Then why should you?'

'Money and a prospective coronet are an apology for *his* suit; while my love or inclination is not consulted in the matter. Could you expect it with mamma and her advisers?' added the girl bitterly.

'I *have* hope, then, Gertrude?' said Vere, in a low voice, full of joy.

'Oh, hush—we are observed!'

'By whom?'

'Mamma—and—and—'

But it was not mamma whose image the girl's fears had conjured up, but Colonel Derinzy who appeared in the far vista of the conservatory.

'Please to be reasonable with me,' she urged piteously.

'I can but think of love, not reason, when I think of you. Give me an answer, for mercy's sake, Gertrude.'

'The day after to-morrow, then.'

'Ah, why such delay? Oh, name a place—a time!'

'After luncheon I have to visit the rectory; be at the stile where last we saw the hounds throw off, and, be it fair or rain, I shall be there.'

All her usual bearing of coolness and placid self-possession came back to her, as she made this remarkable appointment in a hurried whisper, drew on her gloves, and rose with a smile to greet Derinzy, who came lounging up to them, and said, with a little pout,

'You evidently prefer to sit out the square dance, Miss Gertrude.'

'I knew not that dancing was resumed.'

'Yet that band of the Eighth makes row enough for anything.'

'Our dance, I think, Miss Gertrude,' said Vere.

'Pardon me, Vere, it is *mine*,' said the colonel quietly; 'permit me, Miss Gertrude.'

The cards were examined, and Derinzy proved right, while the lady's name on Vere's card seemed a species of hieroglyphic.

'Never mind, Vere; there is nothing in this life worth getting excited about,' was the—so far as Gertrude was concerned—not very complimentary remark of the fashionable Yahoo Derinzy, as he drew the girl's hand through his arm and led her away, with something brighter than one of his usual ready-made smiles rippling over his face, as if he felt that 'now he had the best of it.'

So Vere had said all that he had nerved himself to say, and even more; but an answer was yet to be given. Why this weary delay? he thought; why, after such admissions made on her part?—admissions that too fatally corroborated all that Kyrle Desborough had said, and which filled Vere's mind with doubt and dread and pain, the greater after all that passed in the conservatory. Why this delay? he continued to ask of himself; what difference would four-and-twenty or six-and-thirty hours make in their affairs? He could but wait and hope, and pass these lagging hours as best he might.

But the best of the ball was over now, and to linger near her was only to see her with Derinzy—and that, after what she had said, was torture. He resolved to dance no more that night; indeed, the programme was nearly over, and the ever-thirsty band looked weary in the draughty vestibule; while already carriages were arriving at the *porte cochère*, taking up and departing.

So he joined Desborough and Toby Finch, who were having some champagne-cup ere departing; and the former was quizzing the latter, as he generally did.

'A lovely girl that was, you addicted yourself to half the night, Toby.'

'Yes; deuced hard that I could only get the cold-meat train from Waterloo. I'd have made my innings else. She is a Miss Fenn.'

'Any of the Lincolnshire Fens?'

'I believe so.'

'Precisely, Toby ; your fortune's made. They are the same whom Prince Puckler Muskau, in his *Travels*, asserted to be the oldest family in England.'

'You infantry fellows have been nowhere to-night,' said a cheeky young Hussar, who had imbibed more wine than was good for him.

'Of course,' said Kyrle ; 'all toilette preparations of the ladies were only to "receive cavalry ;" I hope they haven't done so kneeling. Well, Vere,' he added, drawing that personage aside, 'have *you* made your innings to-night ?'

'Yes,' replied Vere, but with a dubious smile.

'What says the Scotch ballad ?'

"Long have I sought sweet *Gertrude's* heart,
And dropped the tear and heaved the sigh ;
But vain the lover's wily art
Beneath a sister's watchful eye."'

'I outflanked the fair Maud to-night, though, Kyrle.'

As he bade the family adieu, muttering, in the usual fashion, how much he had enjoyed the ball, and so forth, he read a cold inquiring glance in the haughty eyes of the dowager ; but a quick bright smile in those of Gertrude, so much as to say, 'I shall not forget ;' and that smile haunted him as he hurried away.

'Any one for the South Camp ?' cried a voice.

It was that of Toby Finch, who had some vacant places in his hired vehicle. These were speedily filled by Vere, Desborough, and Clive. The drive home was a pretty long one ; and Vere, sunk in a species of dream, seemed to hear the voice of Gertrude mingling with half-tipsified remarks of Finch and Clive, two of the most rackety subs in the regiment.

Though no snow had fallen, the surrounding landscape looked white under the gleaming stars of the early morning ; for the frost was sharp, and everything seemed to sparkle in a network of silver, and great icicles hung from cottage eaves

and garden gates, and over all the locality through which the party drove there seemed to brood a sleepy calm and silence ; so, oblivious of the chaffing conversation of his friends, Vere gave full swing to his own thoughts.

He loved Gertrude honestly, faithfully, and with genuine affection. What to him were the cold-blooded schemes of her mother, the 'snobbish' selfishness inculcated by their 'set,' save that it was his duty to save her from them ? As he thought of the latter he felt almost republican—and in this age of the world the said ideas seem more than ever absurd, and, though behind the age and its spirit, they are peculiarly of the age and a part of it ; yet there is no blood in the peerage so noble that much of it will not mingle with that sprung from the gutter, if the said 'gutter-blood,' as the Scots call it, has gold with it.

The events of that ball were fraught with thought to others as well as him. There were Kyrle Desborough's kiss and the glove begged with so much apparent *empressement*. Kyrle thought little of the kiss, if he thought at all ; and as for the glove, it was forgotten, or found by his servant, Private Smith, and taken by him, like others, to clean his rifle or polish his accoutrements—he had often found such stray gloves in the captain's pockets 'come handy.' But with poor Rosamund the kiss had burnt into her heart !

Her 'set' do not think much of such things, would have been the scornful reflection of Desborough, if he had reflected about it at all. A kiss ! bah ! So the girl was no more thought about seriously than the last year's snow, or only remembered as a means of helping him to spend a pleasant hour or two. The affectations of such people as Lady Templeton and 'her lot' had brought a really good fellow to view them with contempt and to steel his heart against. '*A bas les aristocrats !*' he was wont to say, as he had learned to despise their cold-blooded selfishness and snobbery ; but it was currently thought in the regiment that at some period or other Kyrle had met with some sharp affront or bitter disappointment.

‘By Jove, Desborough, but you did go the pace with the little Templeton!’ said Toby Finch.

‘And you with the prize widow, Toby.’

‘A thirty-thousand-pounder and perfection!’

‘With all her pride,’ said Desborough, ‘the fair Maud does lean on her partner’s shoulder in a mode more suggestive of the girl one meets in a dancing *salon* than one of England’s honourable misses.’

‘But, Kyrle, old man,’ said Clive, ‘I saw that you missed two or three dances, and sat in the conservatory with the fair Maud.’

‘Spoonng, by Jove!’ exclaimed Finch.

‘Not at all. I was only enjoying statistics.’

‘How?’

‘I had all the petty scandals and so forth affecting the *débutantes* of the last season, with hints as to how some of their paternal acres stood.’

‘Ah! Anything more?’

‘A few stupid matches made and separations about to come off; yet all told with a hauteur blended with natural spite that, to say the least of it, was very amusing to me.’

‘You are very severe, Desborough.’

‘Not at all; but it would do some of these folks good to hear how their best friends speak of them.’

‘But the fair Rosamund is a gem.’

‘Though bored to death by that wretched old baronet.’

‘How old is the noble Methusaleh?’

‘Don’t know; even *Burke* and *Debrett* don’t, I think. But it is touching to see the old fellow spoonng after a golden-haired girl, and affecting to get up the mutual lover business. But here we are at the camp, and there goes the morning gun!’ added Kyrle Desborough, as they swept up the Farnborough road and past the ‘Tumble-down-Dick.’

‘Fair laughed the morn, and soft the zephyr played,’ exclaimed Finch, in reply to a sentinel’s challenge, and then they bowled into the silent lines of the South Camp. ‘I

haven't lost my heart over-night ; and yet there were some girls there worth throwing the handkerchief to.'

'The Lincolnshire Fens, eh ?' said Vere.

'Yes ; and Gertrude Templeton too, friend Herbert,' retorted Toby. 'But here is my wigwam, and, happy thought ! we must each have a pick-me-up ; the best is b.-and-s., or soda-water with milk and a good dash of curaoa. Ugh ! how dark it is, and how cold ! These infernal Aldershot huts are mere booths,' he added, as they stumbled into the dark and narrow passage, where each in succession knocked his shins against the iron coal-box of the double establishment—each hut being for two officers.

But matches and a candle were found on the small deal shelf, which projected about three inches above Toby's dingy little grate ; and a greater contrast than his 'den,' with its appurtenances, presented to the abode they had just quitted it would be difficult to imagine. Yet they were all, even Vere, as jolly and noisy as possible, being soon joined by others who had been at the ball ; and now it was brandy-and-soda over and over again, as if to correct all they had taken before and steady them for the work of the day. It was not much to face, certainly, then ; there were no musketry practice, judging-distance drill, or anything else to be done, but simply to appear on parade, the morning bugles for which sounded ere they separated to 'tub' and assume their uniform.

So the diamond ring was *not* put on the pretty finger after after all ; but Herbert Vere sighed hopefully as he replaced it in his dressing-case. A time might come !

CHAPTER V.

IN LADY TEMPLETON'S BOUDOIR.

THOUGH the boom of the morning gun was unheard amid the woodlands round Ringwood Hall, it was not till about the time it pealed over the double camp that Lady Templeton

and her daughters followed the example of their resident guests, as they, but more especially the former, were disposed to linger and talk over the events of the ball, some of which were not without results.

After any ball, especially such as that at Ringwood Hall, which had been given of necessity in return for many, there must always be a sinking of the spirit consequent to reaction, and of this most sensibly were Gertrude and Rosamund aware, all the more as a winter storm in all its dreariness came on during the subsequent day, and chained up the household.

Short and sharp showers of winter sleet swept over the heathy wastes and fallow fields, to pour their strength upon the ivied walls and painted windows of the old mansion. The blast swelled at times into hurricanes, and boughs and branches from the ancient trees—even from King James's oak—torn by the eddying wind, came sweeping against the projecting oriels. It was very depressing, all the more so as sad, bitter, and angry thoughts had succeeded to the gaiety and brilliance of the scene, the music of the Eighth's band, and the crush of the jolly supper, while Gertrude trembled in her heart lest the meeting of the morrow might thus be marred. Yet what would it avail? what had she to tell?

We have said that Lady Templeton and her daughters lingered together after their guests had departed; but, weary and sick of the family conclave, Gertrude was not long in following their example, as she feared to be taken—as poor little Rosamund was—to task for certain errors, or what their mother chose to consider as such.

As for Colonel Derinzy, but little reference was certainly made to him by Lady Templeton, who had begun to deem the engagement between him and Gertrude as a settled point—a nearly accomplished fact; and as the latter heard it referred to in this manner, and then dismissed, the earnest eyes and pleading voice of Vere came painfully and upbraidingly back to her memory.

So Gertrude retired to commune with her own thoughts,

and give way to her tears unseen. In her heart she acknowledged that she loved Vere, and never could love Derinzy ; but she had no hope of her iron-hearted mother ever consenting that she should receive the addresses of the former, so to what end was the scene in the conservatory or the secret meeting to which it was to lead ?

Her heart was wrung and painfully agitated.

To-morrow—it was to-morrow now—she would see him, however, though perhaps for the last time. The last time ! Could it be so ? Happy it is for us that the future is a sealed book ; how otherwise should we be able to face all, or anything—even the events of the morrow ?

So far into the remainder of that morning she lay awake, brooding fondly over the past, and bitterly over the future ; awake, striving to unravel the tangled skein of care, a prey to doubt and love, perplexity and sorrow, while from time to time the murmur of voices came from her mother's boudoir, and her heart foreboded much of what was passing there ; for she knew that she was not the only victim to circumstances then in Ringwood Hall, and knew it well.

Rosamund had enjoyed herself so much—oh, so much ! She had danced through all the programme, and more ; she had ever so many dances with Kyrle Desborough, and was dreaming over them all again, and of the hope that he would but love her truly, as she loved him, and that he was rich enough to please even her mamma, when the latter summoned her to the boudoir, just as she began to divest herself of her jewelry, having followed the saddened Gertrude.

Rosamund felt alarm : had they been overheard or seen in the gallery ? That kiss ! ‘ There are moments which people would sometimes give a whole lifetime to recall and use differently, but in vain ; ’ and that moment in the short life of Rosamund was one of them. That kiss, so lightly taken, so blushing given—the kiss that should never have been given at all—burned, we have said, into the girl's heart. If Kyrle did not love her, why did he dare to touch her lips ? If it were only sport, still more how did he dare ? ‘ Oh, yes—yes ;

he must love me, and shall yet save me from that which I know is coming !' she murmured on her lips and in her heart, as it were, when she sought her mother's presence with sure forebodings.

During the ball Rosamund had perceived that of which no one else was sensible—that Lady Templeton was somewhat *distracte*; and even Maud too, but much less so; and this she attributed to the last of several visits lately paid by the family solicitor.

'I am displeased with you, Rosamund,' said her mother; 'you danced too much with that Captain Desborough——'

'Oh, mamma, I only did so when he asked me.'

'He filled half your card at the beginning of the evening, which was most unfair to other guests, as even Sir Ayling Aldwinkle remarked.'

'Well, round dancing is not much in his way now, I fancy; and as for Captain Desborough——'

'He, Sir Ayling tells me, has long been set down as a *non*-marrying man, who looks upon women as toys, and their society as a pastime, to be enjoyed when he has not in his hand the sword, the whip, or the gun. It is even whispered that he is a woman-hater, yet is one of those men who pretend to have eyes only for one woman's eyes, and ears for only one woman's voice——'

'Oh, mamma, you wrong him! Kind, considerate, tender, and courteous to all women, Kyrle——'

'Kyrle!'

'Captain Desborough is only so to me,' added poor Rosamund, colouring painfully.

'It was not, however, to praise or reprehend Captain Desborough I sent for you, Rosamund; I have a matter of more importance to speak about concerning yourself.'

'About *me*, mamma?'

'Yes,' replied Lady Templeton sharply, yet with a sigh, as if in weariness of the opposition she anticipated.

It this hard-hearted old woman of the world had a weakness or tenderness in her composition, it was regard for Rosa-

mund ; and yet she felt in the inner core of her heart—or the useful article which passed for such—that for the emergencies of position and the requirements of society, and most imperatively those of the family exchequer, she would make a suttee of her in the end ; but delayed until *now* the formal revelation she had to make, and which, perhaps, the advent of Kyrle Desborough had brought to an issue.

Her ladyship proceeded at once—as Rosamund’s heart foreboded—to open the trenches, and a spirit of opposition at once grew in the girl’s heart, but opposition that failed to last under the pressure put upon it.

‘ My darling, what do you think of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle ?’

‘ I think he is a funny old thing, mamma.’

‘ Old ?’

‘ Yes ; he must be twenty years older than you.’

‘ Not quite ; but I shall be well pleased if you approve of him, darling. He is only a baronet, certainly ; but his title is one of the oldest in England, and his wealth is enormous, while Winklestone is one of the finest mansions in the country.’

‘ What have I to do with all that ?’ asked Rosamund, dismayed, though not unprepared for this.

‘ He loves you, my child ; and I have hinted as much before.’

‘ Absurd ! I might be his grand-daughter !’ exclaimed the girl, cresting up her head in supreme disdain. ‘ Even were he young and handsome——’

‘ Like Kyrle Desborough,’ suggested Maud.

‘ Yes, like Kyrle Desborough,’ repeated Rosamund, with sparkling eyes, ‘ I would not have him. I am in no hurry to marry ; there is plenty of time for that.’

‘ But not enough to avert ruin, perhaps,’ said Lady Templeton, with increasing gravity.

‘ Ruin ! Oh, mamma, cease to urge me on this most unpleasing subject ; it is impossible that I could love him, however much he may fancy that he loves me. He could never, with all his vanity—and he has plenty of that—

imagine that, or that he could ever win me ; and if he ventures to speak to me on the matter I shall distinctly refuse him—the silly, absurd old thing.'

'Rosamund !'

'Mamma, I am out of all patience, and very sleepy.'

'If you venture to refuse him, do so softly, I beseech you, at first.'

'I don't think his heart will break,' said Rosamund, laughing.

'I am not so sure of that. However, leave him a chance, lest you should—as I fully expect you will be obliged to do—change your mind. The dreams of romantic affection, instilled by novels chiefly, are no longer suited to modern society——'

'But to nature, mamma.'

'We don't live in a state of nature,' replied Lady Templeton, with more asperity than she usually permitted herself to assume. 'Considering Sir Ayling's vast wealth, and the splendour of the establishment he can give you, some gratitude is certainly due to him for the honour of his proposal.'

'Honour ! I am Lord Templeton of Ringwood's daughter, mamma ! Gratitude I may give, perhaps ; but love—oh, the idea is too absurd !' ('Love,' she thought in her heart ; 'alas, perhaps mine is bestowed where it is little valued.')

Perceiving that her mother eyed her gloomily, sadly, and with growing anger, she said :

'I am so tired, mamma. May I go, or have you more to say on this disagreeable subject ?'

'Much,' replied Lady Templeton sharply.

'I won't marry for money, mamma ; I won't marry for a title. A title ! what is a mere baronet's wife ? I don't want to be married at all. I would rather——'

'What—what ?'

'Oh, mamma, I don't know—I don't know !' exclaimed Rosamund, in anger, beginning to knot up the masses of her glorious golden hair with white and trembling fingers that all but failed in their office,

‘Starve in the obscurity of some continental town ; for it may come to that, perhaps—nay, too surely.’

‘Starve? I do not understand you!’ exclaimed Rosamund, pausing in her perplexity, and letting the masses of her hair roll over her snowy shoulders.

‘Then understand this. Listen to me,’ replied her mother, through her set teeth.

Kyrle Desborough was right in the suspicion he had expressed to Herbert Vere ; for now Lady Templeton unfolded to Rosamund that they had far, far exceeded their income ; that debts had accumulated on every hand ; and that even could they part with the family plate, jewels, pictures, and timber—none of which they were permitted to touch—they could not be saved from shame, and the deprivation of carriages, horses, servants, dresses, and entertainments, and their house in town. That Sir Ayling Aldwinkle—good, worthy, kind Sir Ayling—was now fully aware of their crying necessities, and was willing to come to the rescue, and could save them by a dash of his pen, if she, Rosamund, would but listen with favour to his proposal, and accept the splendid settlements he could make upon her.

The girl heard her mother in bewilderment, growing whiter and whiter as she proceeded ; for in the genuine selfishness of her nature, in her terror of how ‘society’ would regard the collapse of her affairs and a retreat to Wiesbaden or some obscure continental town, Lady Templeton waxed earnest, almost tender and beseeching, and well-nigh eloquent.

‘Are matters indeed so bad with us, mamma?’ asked the startled girl, after a pause, and trying to realise a state of affairs of which she had not the faintest conception ; for that all they enjoyed in the way of equipage, service, state, splendour, position in town and country, with all the elements of ease and luxury, should pass away at one fell swoop for ever, or even for years, seemed as incomprehensible and impossible as that the sun should cease to rise on the morrow. ‘Are matters so bad?’ she repeated.

‘So bad that, when the storm breaks, Rosamund, we may

all have to quit Ringwood Hall, without having one maid to attend us instead of four.'

'And Sir Ayling can save us from all this dreadful ruin and disgrace?'

'Yes,' said Lady Templeton eagerly, and with the first approach to a tear Rosamund had ever within her memory seen in the cold steel-grey eyes.

'Oh, mamma, if one of us must be sacrificed—for it is the sacrifice of a life, of existence itself—would he not take Maud?'

'No; you, and you only,' replied Lady Templeton; and Maud, who had hitherto silently watched her younger sister with a mingled expression of face, now repeated the sentence, and smiled with disdain at the suggested alternative.

The fair young brow of Rosamund grew dark and troubled.

Monetary perils, the result of extravagance and vanity on one hand, with the prospect of immediate relief therefrom on the other, together with a noble settlement for one of her daughters, so inflamed Lady Templeton's temper at the appearance of opposition to her will from one who had no right, she deemed, to have a will of her own, and in whose face she saw the spirit of silent opposition gathering, that she began to exhibit more fury in her eyes than her daughters had ever seen there before, as all exhibitions of emotion, of any kind whatever, she deemed 'bad form.'

Derinzy, Gertrude's open admirer, and, as many supposed, *fancé*, had only a handsome allowance besides his pay, and could not avail her in this emergency, though he had a viscounty in certain prospect. Thus to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle she was compelled to turn, as the man who alone could avert the coming crisis, and was willing to do so, provided the required sacrifice were made.

And all this had been suddenly, and, save when selfishness woke emotion, callously unfolded to the poor girl at the very time when a mighty and absorbing passion had been kindled in her impulsive heart, filling it and thrilling it, 'and teaching it the lesson which is as old as Time, yet which each new-

born child must perforce learn for itself—the lesson that delight is twin with pain, and that to live is to suffer.’

Rosamund had heard the story of their impending ruin, but was still silent. She had been compelled to hear all this, with the music of the ball yet making her pulses vibrate, with the memory of Kyrle Desborough’s kiss upon her lip, the knowledge that he had still her glove, but that no word of love had escaped him ; and yet she loved him so !

Lady Templeton banned in her heart the day that brought our battalion of the Eighth or King’s to Aldershot Camp, as she feared, and justly, that Desborough’s handsome eyes—‘wild dark Irish eyes’ she had heard them called—and his winning manner had much to do with the silent opposition and expression of disgust and despair she could now perceive in the face of Rosamund ; but she was too politic quite to treat her as a child, and urge, in the usual terms, her submission to the dictum of those who were older and wiser than herself, or to hint that she had any secret or unworthy reason for declining the offer of Sir Ayling’s hand and settlement.

Though a domestic despot of a very high kind, she never gave way to violent manifestations of authority. Such she would have deemed unbecoming ; but ‘as the water-drop wears out the stone,’ so, she resolved, would she quietly grind Rosamund to her purpose, and most studiously would she be from home when Captain Desborough and one or two more rode over from that obnoxious camp.

Thus dissembling her real nature and purpose, she took her daughter’s hand with more pretended emotion than she was really capable of feeling, and said,

‘I hope, darling, you quite understand all this, and the difficulty and delicacy of our position. With regard to an engagement and marriage with Sir Ayling, you are at liberty to fix your own time. With all his love he will not hurry you. So we will not speak more on the subject till you have become accustomed to the thought, and to receive him as your future husband. I see that the proposal—though you must have expected it—has startled you, and taken you by surprise ; but

you don't know how happy you will be when it is all over. And now God bless you, darling. Good-night—or morning rather, and a sound sleep to you.'

Then, kissing her daughter on each cheek, Lady Templeton retired, to find her luckless abigail sound asleep in her dressing-closet.

Rosamund stood for a few minutes like one turned to stone; she then shivered, uttered a strange bitter laugh, and turned away to her own room, to think over all she had heard.

Could it be that ruin and disgrace—the disgrace, at least, of debt—were hanging over them all? and the closing of their house in town, the disappearance of their equipage from the Park, and of themselves from every public place, was to prove a nine days' wonder and source of contemptuous speculation and mock commiseration for 'the set' among whom they moved and for whom they lived? A nine days' wonder it would be indeed, as she knew by her own brief experience of what 'society' is. And could it be that she, and she alone, could save them all from this? But at what a price!

From the time she had been a baby in her lace *berceau*-nette she had ever been surrounded by luxury and magnificence. Could it be that all their triumphs and pleasures were over? that all must go—jewels, admirers, the splendid equipages, and the gay crowds amid which they moved—unless——

'Oh, that Desborough would save me! He is rich—rich enough, they say, even to suit mamma,' she wailed in her heart.

From that time her long persecution and misery began; and spoiled and indulged as she had been by prosperity, wealth, and position, her first lessons in the realities of life were hard and trying ones.

On the day subsequent to the ball, Sir Ayling, after a long interview with Lady Templeton, took his departure from Ringwood Hall, for three reasons. It was thought advisable to let Rosamund get accustomed to think of him as her intended in his absence, which he deemed the more necessary,

as he had caught a cold with a hacking cough, and had also certain premonitory twinges of gout ; and he had no desire that Rosamund might discover him with a shawl over his old shoulders, his feet rolled up in flannel, and his valet giving him thin toast, dry sherry, and colchicum.

Well muffled up in a coat lined with Russian sables, and a hot water-bottle in his carriage, he drove off for Winkle-stoke, leaving his formal proposals as yet unmade, but with a pretty present for the acceptance of Rosamund ; thus showing that he would not adopt her cold reception of his attentions, and hoped to be on a better and more tender footing with her in the time to come.

But he ground his set of beautiful Parisian teeth, as he saw from a distance the huts of the South Camp, and knew that a curly-headed Irishman, named Kyrle Desborough, dwelt there.

CHAPTER VI.

VERE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

ON the stormy day subsequent to the ball Vere was on duty as 'brigade officer of the day,' and as such he had not much more to do than to visit and inspect the guards and canteens of the brigade, as at that season there was no bathing picket at Claycart Hill ; so his time passed slowly, all the more so that Desborough was on guard, Clive had gone up to town, and Toby Finch, in suit of waterproofs, asserting 'it was a glorious day for a nibble,' had betaken himself to Fleet Pond in search of the gregarious roach and the pike.

Cast thus upon himself, the day was a long one to Vere, and full of alternate doubts and hopes ; for thus it is that 'human weakness, if it has not real trials, invents imaginary ones, and, with a persistent desire to suffer, accepts the imaginary for the real.' With intense eagerness he looked forward to the interview—the meeting—so frankly accorded

to him by Gertrude Templeton, and gathered hope from the fact that it had been so accorded. Anon hope died, when he thought of her mother and all that lady's ambitions, powers, plans, and influence. Of her dire necessities he, fortunately, knew nothing ; but fear of her influence over one so gentle as Gertrude oppressed him like a nightmare, and haunted him sleeping or waking. When shaving, the mirror seemed to reflect the face of Lady Templeton and not his own, so he gave his chin an unpleasant gash. She came between him and his appetite at breakfast ; and when he made his round of the guards, their fixed bayonets reminded him of the cold steely glitter of her proud inquiring eyes.

He got through the day somehow, after sundry pick-me-ups at the mess-hut. Evening came, when he had to parade the inlying pickets of the brigade and the fire-screen parties, while the massed drums and fifes of the brigade, with their drum-majors in front, beat 'the retreat' along the lines, with swarms of children scampering and trundling hoops before them.

This ended the duty for the day ; and as stillness began to settle over the hushed camps, and the twilight was clear and frosty, Vere, sunk in thought, strolled away to the utmost boundary of the lines—beyond which, as being on duty, he could not go—to indulge in his fancies and a fragrant havannah together.

His mind was ever recurring to all that had passed in the conservatory, and he conned over it, communed over it, and re-acted it in fancy again and again, with happiness in his heart and a sunny smile in his eyes, till he *did* stray beyond the boundaries of the camp, and found himself in a narrow path, between clumps of wiry and gloomy Scotch firs and masses of gorse, and to return was his instant thought—return without delay—lest he should be missed or required ; for in a great camp like that at Aldershot one never can know what may happen at any time.

He was about to retrace his steps more quickly than he had come, when two figures—a woman and that of a mounted

man—appeared at the end of the path where it diverged from the road that led direct to the camp; and in the latter—gloomy though the twilight, and in a place made darker by the branches of the great firs overhead—he recognised Jocelyn Derinzy, but in plain clothes. He was stooping from his horse, so low that his arm was round the neck of the female, whose upturned face was perilously close to his, and they seemed in close, tender, and earnest conversation. This placed Vere in a dilemma.

If he remained where he was he must play the part of eavesdropper; to retire was to increase the distance between him and the camp. Thick hedgerows and stake-fences precluded any detour, and to advance might put him in the power of a senior officer, who knew that he was on duty, and by whom he was secretly detested as a rival, though they never met without smiles and much apparent cordiality, for such is the necessary hypocrisy of well-bred society; and now to put himself in that rival's power was a move to be avoided if possible.

'He surely would not be such a beastly cad as to take advantage of the situation, and put me under arrest,' thought Vere; 'but better not trust to *his* good-nature anyway,' he added, and shrank a little back.

'You were kinder to me when the gorse was in all its golden bloom,' he heard the girl say; for she was a mere girl, but a very pretty one, as she assumed an upbraiding tone.

'Don't say so, darling Phœbe,' exclaimed the colonel, as he stooped and kissed her; 'you know the proverb?'

'When the gorse is out of bloom kissing is out of fashion,' was the inviting rejoinder.

'Exactly—for the gorse is never entirely out of bloom, darling. But you should not have come so far as this alone—tipsy fellows or a patrol may meet you, and something unpleasant might occur.'

'I came, as you know, to meet *you*,' said the girl, in a tender voice, as their meeting seemed about to end.

‘You foolish little pet, when I am just going to where you have so nearly come from!’

‘Ringwood Hall?’

‘Yes—I dine there this evening. Return by rail—be wary, silent, and remember your promise of secrecy—that must be observed at all hazards.’

Then, stooping again, he kissed her with great apparent affection, put spurs to his horse, and galloped down the Farnborough road.

That Derinzy was going to dine with the Templetons was not an unusual circumstance; but Vere would rather have known nothing about his movements, and that he would be privileged to spend so many hours, with a mother’s approval, in the society of the girl he—Vere—loved; but when this emotion of pique, and then his surprise, passed away, he resolved to ascertain who this girl—she was not a lady, though pretty and graceful enough to be so—was upon whom the great lumbering heir of Viscount Derinzy bestowed so much tenderness, and, as he thought, so secretly.

The girl seemed lost in thought, so much so that she knew not the approach of Vere, who heard her muttering,

‘He is deceiving me; but ere I go home to-night I will learn the truth of what he means by Miss Gertrude—I will, I will!’ Then she began to weep, and uttered a slight cry of alarm, when Vere stood suddenly before her in the fading light; for in his grey regimental overcoat and shako, to her untutored eye, she knew not whether he was an officer or one of the rank and file, but most probably concluded he was the latter.

‘Pardon me if I have startled you,’ said he, in his most reassuring tone; ‘but, as your friend who has just left you has hinted, this is an awkward locality at such an hour for a girl who is alone and so attractive as you.’

‘Thank you, sir; but my business is my own,’ replied the girl rather sullenly and coldly.

‘Of course, and I have no desire to intrude; but as you named a friend of mine, may I ask who you are, my girl?’

'Phœbe Bagshaw. Are you the wiser for knowing ?

'Where do you live ?

'Not far from Ringwood Hall ; my father is the game-keeper. And now, sir, will you answer a question or two of mine ? Is that road the direct way to the South Camp ?

'Yes ; but the sentinels will not admit you—a stranger—at this hour ; to do so would be against orders.'

'Then I have come on a bootless errand,' said the girl sorrowfully.

'Whom do you wish to see ?' asked Vere, in all kindness.

'An officer in the F lines of the South Camp.'

'My regiment is in those lines,' said Vere, turning away with a laugh that implied a good deal.

'Perhaps you know him, sir ?' asked the girl, ignorant of his suspicion.

'Very probably ; what is his name ?

'Vere—Mr. Herbert Vere.'

'Vere of the Eighth ?

'Yes, sir.'

'I know him very well,' said the other, laughing again ; 'do you ?

'Yes,' she replied, blushing : 'you must have seen us part.'

'Us ?

'Yes—a moment ago ; he was mounted.'

'What the deuce are you talking about, girl ?' said he, now becoming grave ; 'I am Vere of the Eighth, and there is not another of the name in the whole camp.'

'This may be chaff, but it isn't gentlemanly to a poor girl, who is quite alone here.'

'There is more in all this than meets the ear,' said he, now becoming seriously angry. 'I assure you, on my honour, that I am he of whom you speak—Lieutenant Vere of the Eighth or King's.'

'Very likely !' replied the girl, with pert incredulity ; 'then *who* is he that has just left me ?

'Colonel Jocelyn Derinzy of the staff.'

The girl laughed scornfully now.

‘Have you known him long?’ asked Vere earnestly.

‘For four anxious months,’ she replied sadly.

‘As Derinzy?’

‘No, as Mr. Vere of the South Camp; and only yesterday heard he was in the Eighth or King’s.’

‘And you are the daughter of the gamekeeper at Ringood Hall?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘There is some monstrous piece of rascality in all this—a rascality which I must unravel!’ exclaimed Vere, as, with an motion of rage, he took in the whole situation, and saw much therein that might prove perilous and troublesome to himself.

‘By what right do you say all this?’ demanded the girl, ring up in defence of her lover. ‘I have heard that you *oth* were sweet upon our Miss Gertrude, and all the family say that *you*, colonel, are to be married to her, though they say she doesn’t care a fig about you; and as for attempting to pass yourself off as Mr. Vere, it is a low shabby trick, for which I hate you—that I do!’

And, snapping her pretty little fingers directly in his face in token of her angry contempt, Phœbe Bagshaw hastened away in a fume; at the same moment a hasty and impatient bugle-call, the ‘fire-alarm’ (it proved to be a false one), made Vere forget his indignation and rush back to the camp, where the inlying pickets were getting under arms, and the engines being brought forth.

This discovery ‘knocked Vere into a cocked hat,’ as he phrased it, when telling the story to Finch and Desborough some time after; but he resolved that the following day should see the colonel brought to book: he meant to threaten to expose him to the whole service and to every club in town; to upbraid him with his treachery and falsehood, and wring some explanation or satisfaction from him at all hazards. But among these very hazards prudence suggested that, while carried away by his passion, might not the name of Gertrude Templeton get somehow involved with the affair?

while he himself might be accused by the ignorant and unthinking of rivalry and revenge ; as it can never be foreseen what turn a disreputable story may take, or what may grow out of it. Yet, at all risks, he resolved to be face to face with the Honourable Jocelyn at an early hour on the morrow, and confound him if possible.

CHAPTER VII.

BAFFLED.

'IT is easier to conceive than describe the complicated sensations which are felt from the pain of a recent injury, and the pleasure of approaching vengeance,' says Goldsmith, with much truth ; and with some such emotions in his mind, the moment that morning parade was over on the following day, Vere set forth to 'have it out' with the colonel.

His ideas of vengeance were as vague as his hopes of obtaining 'satisfaction.' Once upon a time, the mode of getting the latter was plain enough, easy enough, and understood by all ; but duels—in England at least—are as much behind the age as chain-mail or Scotch moss-troopers, never having been heard of since Munro of the Blues fought his fatal one at Chalk Farm ; but be they behind the age or not, Vere felt it in his heart to have paraded Derinzy at the Beacon Hill or by the margin of Fleet Pond with extreme pleasure.

It was daring indeed of the latter to play the game he was doing in a country district, and within a circle so narrow (though there are usually above six hundred officers in Aldershot), and not—as he might have done it more safely—in the wilderness of London ; more than all with one of Lady Templeton's household—for though resident in a solitary cottage on the estate, the keeper's daughter might almost be deemed so ; while substitution of Vere's name for his own showed in Derinzy a recklessness of consequences on the

one hand, with considerable meanness, spite, and animus on the other ; and all these thoughts crowded the brain of the former as he approached the colonel's residence, a pretty little villa on the verge of the camp, embosomed among bays and rhododendrons in winter, and equally so by roses in summer.

That Derinzy was lax in morals and dissipated all men knew ; yet Vere was unprepared for the trickery he had discovered. It was rather notorious that there was a villa in one of the prettiest of London suburbs, which was not taken in his own name, and occupied by a lady who did not take his name either, and whose tiny equipage, with its horses and harness, was so perfect in style as to create a sensation even in the Park.

The lady with the bijou villa and brougham is so familiar to those who know London life, that no excuse is necessary for mentioning her ; but we are sorry to say that, with all his pretensions to the hand of Gertrude Templeton, the existence of this establishment was known to the dowager, and in her estimation formed no blot on the escutcheon of the future viscount. Men will be men, thought her ladyship, and when married be finished sowing their wild oats ; 'a species of seed,' says a writer, 'which, being universally acknowledged to contain, besides every small vice extant, the germs of the seven deadly sins, has this remarkable peculiarity, that, being once sown, it is popularly supposed to bring forth a plentiful crop of all the domestic virtues.'

Late though the hour for such a meal, the colonel was at breakfast in a luxurious and sunny little room, the oriel windows of which faced the far extent of the Long Valley, terminated by the green summit of Twiseldown Hill and the race-ground. A bright fire blazed on the hearth, above which hung a chalk drawing of the lady referred to. Close by was drawn a sofa, on which, wrapped in a dressing-gown of the richest brocaded silk, lounged the bulky well-fed form of Jocelyn Derinzy.

There were coffee, rolls, and marmalade on the breakfast-

table, but therewith were a bottle of brandy and liqueur-glass, with a few cigars. The colonel did not hear his visitor announced, so absorbed was he in a book, the contents of which did not add to his amiability of mind, as it was his betting one; and in addition to losing some hundreds at *écarté*, after returning from Ringwood Hall last night, he had heard some very strange rumours concerning one or two horses which he had backed heavily in certain events that were yet to come off; and he had been going through his calculations again and again, and referring to the latest odds, muttered:

‘It must go right, the mare is sure to run—there is not a horse that can come near her—or else I am in a devil of a hole!’

He thrust the book with a curse into his pocket, and placed his hand again upon the brandy decanter, just as Vere approached him, and certainly his face expressed surprise.

‘Oh—aw—aw—the deuce—didn’t hear you announced. Good-morning, Vere—be seated; what is up?’

The latter question was sufficient to indicate that Herbert Vere was not one of the colonel’s visitors. He neither took a seat nor Derinzy’s hand; neither did he respond to the insipid but well-bred smile that rippled over the fair stupid face of the latter.

‘Hope you enjoyed the Templeton’s ball,’ he began, with a puzzled expression at that which he read in the face of his visitor; ‘hale old fellow Sir, Ayling Aldwinkle—aw—aw——’

‘Yes; his liver has certainly outlasted his heart, if he ever had one,’ replied Vere grimly.

‘He has still an eye for a pretty girl, though.’

‘Perhaps; but I did not come here to speak about him, or the ball either.’

‘About—the ladies?’

‘No.’

‘What then?’

‘Yourself!’ replied Vere, in a tone of undoubted sternness, as he placed his forage-cap on his head.

Regarding him steadily with his great china-blue eyes, the colonel rose to his feet, planted them on the hearthrug, and, placing his back to the chimneypiece, seemed to await an explanation, and it came speedily to pass.

‘Colonel Derinzy,’ said Vere, ‘what is the man who appends another’s name to a cheque, a bill, or a calumnious letter?’

The colonel’s face expressed blank astonishment, though he was one of those vapid, unimpressible and languid dandies who consider the exhibition of any emotion as a bad style of manner.

‘Answer me!’

‘I don’t understand the drift of your question,’ replied the colonel, with cool *insouciance*, ‘and as little do I pretend to understand your present tone and bearing in my quarters; but I should say that the person you describe would be a forger, a felon, a trickster, and all that sort of thing.’

‘Exactly! Then what is he who assumes another’s name in any dark, dishonourable, or nefarious transaction?’

Derinzy made no reply, but threw the skirts of his long dressing-gown over his arms, and for a moment, casting aside the cold air of reserve which was habitual to him by training and by nature, he certainly looked disturbed, yet defiant, as he knew Vere’s meaning now.

‘For your obscure and treacherous amours among the domestics of your friends,’ said the latter, with intense scorn and sternness, ‘Snooks, Jones, Smith, or any of the stereotyped names of the usual low dodger, might have suited your purpose; but to substitute *my* name for your absurd French or Jewish one has been, to say the least of it, the act of an impertinent scoundrel.’

Derinzy started and almost gasped on hearing this epithet applied to him and in no measured tones—for all Vere’s genuine dislike for, and jealousy of him, had bubbled up to boiling heat; but drawing himself up to his full height, he threw back his head with an air of defiance, and said mockingly:

‘So you have been with little Phoebe, eh? Well, I should

advise you to betake yourself off to her at once, or, by heaven, I'll throw you out of the window !

As he made this menace he placed his hand on a riding-whip that lay near, on which Vere grasped the hilt of his sword, made a pace forward, and said, with an expression of eye there was no mistaking :

'By the heaven that hears us, Colonel Derinzy, if you touch me with that whip, or even dare to lift it in menace, I will pin your body to that wall.'

Derinzy drew back his hand and changed colour, but began loftily :

'When a madman applies such an epithet to me——'

'I will repeat it.'

'Aw, aw—will you do so in the hearing of my servants or of the orderly in the hall?' asked Derinzy, placing his hand on a bell.

'Most decidedly not.'

'And why?'

'You might indulge yourself in the pleasures of a court-martial. You should be a lawyer, colonel ; you would shine at the bar, if not in the dock. I shall bandy words no more with you ; my object and my source of complaint are patent to you. You have neither the honesty to explain, the good-nature to attempt to palliate, nor the gentlemanly spirit to apologise for a most unwarrantable liberty ; yet there has been a time when a pistol-ball might have compelled you to do so. But cunning or clever as you may think yourself, you must be aware that any way this matter cannot end here.'

'How then?' asked Derinzy, stroking his long fair moustache.

'I shall take the sense of our mess on the subject.'

'Indeed, and what may its opinion matter to me?' was the haughty and insolent response.

'It will matter much, when, through the lieutenant-general commanding, it goes to the Commander-in-Chief at the Horse Guards.'

'There it will never go.'

‘Why not?’

‘Miss Gertrude Templeton’s name would be sure to crop up in the girl’s jealousy of me, and our names would all be mingled in a way that would neither suit your book nor mine; so that I don’t think, Mr. Vere, that the sense of your august mess will ever be taken on the subject. Good-morning.’

Choking with rage, Vere withdrew, and as he walked slowly back to the lines where his hut stood he had time to reflect on the subject. The colonel, in his cunning and cowardice, was right. To make a public *esclandre* of the affair might involve the name or names of the family at Ringwood Hall, and perhaps he had said enough to prevent the use of his name by the colonel in future.

Had he chosen, he conceived that he had now the power of crushing for ever the chances of Derinzy’s favour with Gertrude, though not with the dowager, who, if she made light of the villa and its occupant in Westburnia, would have thought still less about little Phœbe Bagshaw, the keeper’s daughter. But, beside the aversion which any man of honour has to act the part of talebearer, Vere, though wronged and imperilled in the progress of his love, shrank instinctively from even the appearance of seeking jealous vengeance upon his rival by injuring him with the family at Ringwood Hall.

To seek out Phœbe and attempt to expostulate with her before she had seen Derinzy again would be, he felt, of no avail, and might only complicate matters, or end in bringing suspicion on himself; and he was glad to find that Desborough and Finch eventually took the same view of the matter. But then they had less at stake than Vere.

How long or how far the debauchee would have carried his game (unless Phœbe had really visited Vere in his hut, as she had intended), it is impossible to say, and also as to how it found a finale, as Vere heard no more of the matter then, or for long after; for doubtless the colonel had discovered some means of silencing the girl, or diverting her suspicions, while events that followed each other quickly now gave Vere more than enough to think of after his important meeting with Gertrude.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘THE HEART KNOWETH ITS OWN BITTERNESS.’

THE day of irritation and much serious thought after his bitter interview with Derinzy passed away, and the time drew near when Vere was to have his meeting with Gertrude—that interview on which so much depended, and which he was never to forget—and as afternoon approached he left the camp betimes to keep his appointment.

He felt himself degraded, and he felt that the service was degraded too, by such an interview as that which he had with Derinzy, a titled snob and coward, yet bearing the Queen’s commission, and one who would ultimately sit in the Upper House, among the rulers of the land—for that he was personally a coward by his meanness, Vere could not doubt. But whatever he was, once upon a time, in the days of ‘the pistol,’ how different an ending the whole affair must have had !

He thought less and less of it, however, as the time for meeting Gertrude drew near. If she should fail to come, or be prevented ? if she should have changed her mind, or be hampered by an escort ? He was to get an answer to those questions which were so momentous to him—whether she loved him, and whether she was to be his wife. He could scarcely, after all that was past and gone, doubt the former ; but the latter, alas ! If her answer were adverse, would it be to present hope, or would it be final ?

Another idea flashed upon his mind. If he, who was a man of will and determination, with strength of character, felt a passion so deep as that which inspired him for Gertrude, might not the latter, whose nature was so soft, impulsive, and tender, in the ardour of *her* love for him, forget her mother’s ambition, defy her authority, and relinquish future rank, riches, and all the world itself, to become his wife ?

Yet, unless aided by the ample means which were at the

disposal of his uncle Sir Joseph, would it be consistent with honour and duty thus to avail himself of the love of a weak yet brave-hearted girl? No, no; Gertrude Templeton must be won otherwise, or not won at all.

A train on the Winchester line deposited him within a little distance of Ringwood Hall, and his heart leapt as he saw the clustered chimneys, the gilded vanes, and the quaint ogee gables of her abode, as he hastened towards the place of tryst, where last they had seen the hounds throw off.

It was a winter afternoon certainly, one of the last in January; but the sky was blue, clear, and nearly cloudless, and the sunshine fell aslant upon the upland slopes and Hampshire woodlands, brightening the leafless hedgerows, and tinting with touches of gold the huge stems of the old chestnuts and beeches, which in that locality remind one of the days when Norman William made his vast forest in the land of the crushed and conquered Saxons.

The dead and rotting leaves of the past year lay thick under the hedges where the winter winds had swept them; the snowdrop was evolving its white and pendent petals beside the white, yellow, or blue spring crocus in the tiny gardens of the wayside cottages; but the little white Daisy—*La Belle Marguerite*—was lingering yet beneath the soil, though the pipe of the thrush was heard from the topmost bough of a leafless tree, responding to the hardy robin and tomtit in the hedgerow beneath.

Vere had barely reached the old and rustic wooden stile that barred the way between two fields, when he found himself face to face with Gertrude. He sprang towards her, lifted his hat, said something—he knew not what—and drew her hand within his arm, retaining it there in his own.

Her toilette was a perfect one; her hat was smart and piquant; and how lovely she looked when flushed and palpitating with natural excitement, and her walk in the keen air of the winter day! The conventional smile—for it was not a real one—with which she had greeted Vere died away as he gazed upon her, and she said:

‘I trust, Mr. Vere, that you are not surprised at my arranging to meet you here ; but I shall have no other opportunity for saying that—which—which—I have to say.’

She spoke rapidly and nervously, like one who had schooled herself to a task ; and the heart of Vere began already to sink when he found that *she* was taking the initiative in the conversation, and when he saw how painfully her bosom heaved beneath her sealskin jacket, while her little gloved hands were trembling.

‘Gertrude !’ said he appealingly and as if surprised, for she seemed to be acting under some influence beyond her own control.

Under his gaze her colour deepened, then paled again ; her eyes drooped and she sighed heavily, while something like an hysterical spasm rose in her slender white throat.

‘What *is* the matter, my own beloved Gertrude?’ exclaimed Vere tenderly, as he could no longer resist the impulse to press her to his breast, and cover her soft face and silky hair with kisses.

For a moment he thought the latter were returned. Then suddenly she shrank back and held up her hands before her deprecatingly, and how tremulous were those small and shapely hands, one of which he again captured !

‘Let go my hand,’ she urged piteously ; ‘this must not be !’

Yet her soft fingers closed on those of Vere, and her head drooped on his shoulder for a moment, but a moment only, for again she drew back, as she saw the look of passionate love and wistfulness in the handsome face of Vere, who felt that somehow the interview was taking a turn on which he had not calculated.

‘Let me take your arm ; let us be sensible and talk while we walk a little way,’ she urged.

‘You love me, then ?’

‘God knows I do, Herbert !’ said the girl, in a broken voice ; and sweetly sounded his Christian name to him on the lips that for the first time uttered it.

‘Bless you, my darling, for saying so. O Gertrude, to make you my wife is the one longing and passionate desire of my heart !’

But notwithstanding her admission, Gertrude shook her head mournfully, and attempted to withdraw her hand again.

‘How shall I say what I *have* to say?’ exclaimed the girl, covering her face for a moment with her muff. ‘Mr. Vere——’

‘Mr. Vere!’

‘I must not call you Herbert again ; the name escaped me amid my emotion ;’ and as she spoke her soft but naturally proud bright eyes strove, yet in vain, to gaze serenely into his. ‘You know not how ambitious, how worldly—alas that I should say so !—how vain and selfish mamma is, and how completely we are all—Maud, poor little Rosamund, and myself—at her mercy, by the tenor of papa’s will, if we marry without her full consent. You know all now—no, not all quite,’ added the girl drearily, as the conversation in the boudoir after the ball came back to memory. ‘So press me no further, dearest—yes, dearest Herbert ; but let us part here, till—till—till——’

‘When?’

‘Happier times,’ she replied, sobbing.

‘These are but wild words, my darling. There is no law in the land which can force you to marry when you do not wish it.’

‘None, I know ; but there are moral force, domestic tyranny, the use and wont of parental authority—yes, and other pressure.’

‘Other?’

‘Yes.’

Vere looked at her uneasily ; for pride of birth and family prevented her from making a more direct allusion to those affairs that were likely to break the heart of Rosamund. Gertrude only leaned her head against the stem of an old chestnut-tree, and closed her beautiful eyes, while seeking

vainly to keep back those tears that oozed under her long dark lashes—tears which her imperious mother would have despised her for shedding.

‘To mamma wealth and rank are as the necessities of life.’

‘Rank I have not, and too probably shall never have ; but there is my uncle Sir Joseph——’

‘Have you heard of him lately?’ interrupted Gertrude anxiously.

‘No, poor old gentleman. I would that he knew you, Gertrude.’

‘Why?’

‘Can you ask?—is not to see you to love you?’

‘Heaven help me!’ moaned the girl, as if communing with herself; ‘I am very miserable. This meeting is wrong; I should not have granted it. Yet how otherwise could I say what I have said?’

‘Gertrude, be strong: do not yield to any false principle of duty. You permit me to love you, and have avowed that you love me. Think then, Gertrude, of the marriage service, and the love and honour it inculcates. To no other man than me could you promise what that service contains. My life is yours, and with that life only will I give you up!’

Again his arms went round her, and again she was sobbing while strained closely to his breast. For a little space neither spoke; but he pressed wild kisses upon her lips, her cheek, and hair; and during that sweet sad space of time she lay quite still, but sobbing heavily.

‘Now all is over; and, Herbert, we must never meet again—thus, at least,’ said she, suddenly recovering herself. ‘Let us be as dear friends.’

‘Love may end in hate; friendship may end in love; but, O Gertrude, love in friendship—never!’

‘All this interview is but fraught with pain to us both,’ said she, making an effort to be calm, and pressing her hand on her left side, as if she felt a pang there.

Vere tried again to draw her to him ; but resisting with a murmur, she added :

‘ Urge me no further. I have promised—I have solemnly promised——’

‘ What, Gertrude ?’

‘ Obedience to mamma in all things.’

‘ Even in the matter of marriage ?’

‘ In that most distinctly.’

‘ Have you promised to accept Colonel Derinzy ?’

Distasteful though the question—at such a time especially—he asked it firmly and earnestly ; but Gertrude’s only reply was a species of hysteric gasp, so painful to hear that Vere shrank from repeating the question, or pressing her for an answer. But her silence stung him to the very soul, it left so much to be implied ; for there was more in all this than was apparent to either ear or eye ; and he regarded her with a haggard expression, and then with something of anger, which she failed not to see.

‘ O Gertrude,’ said he, ‘ love that is successful may indulge in words that are flattering ; but a love that is hopeless, as I now find mine is——’

‘ After all I have said ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well ?’

‘ Can but speak the words of sadness and truth. Perhaps your heart may really soften to me in the time to come ; and with that hope—delusive it may be—I shall leave England and go abroad,’ said Vere, all unaware that his departure from England was nearer than he thought.

‘ Rather try to forget your ill-fated attachment for me, and win a heart that, all untrammelled, may love and honour you as you deserve. Farewell, Herbert Vere, and God bless you !’

Then, as if she feared to trust herself again within the sound of his voice, she turned quickly into a bypath and hastened homewards, to where the lights were already appearing in the mullioned windows of Ringwood Hall ; while Vere, as if

rooted to the spot, stood gazing after her, till in a minute or two she disappeared—gazing with much of sorrow and more of jealous mortification in his heart. Yet chivalrously he had disdained, as we have said, to take advantage of his knowledge of Derinzy's secret character by exposing it to the girl for whom her mother too evidently intended him ; and perhaps, in the ardour of the time, he forgot all about the use made, and perchance still being made, of his own name by that audacious personage.

Most unwonted though the meeting had been, and the whole tone and tenor thereof, to Gertrude it was deprived of all romance, not by the sorrow, but by the prosaic and worldly bitterness of it, and by the stab which she knew she had been, by force of circumstances, compelled to school herself to give a loyal and honest gentleman, who only loved her too well.

Bitter though the wrench to her heart that she had bidden him farewell for ever, and that never more would his voice fall on her ear, more bitter was the conviction that she had left him with a false, even vile and worldly, idea of herself ; for they had barely been parted ten minutes when she made up her mind, as she thought, that, despite Lady Templeton, she would never marry Derinzy or any one else, and that no power on earth should make her do so.

Poor Gertrude ! But Vere was gone now, and she could not undeceive him by unsaying what she had said, and, more than all, by saying what she had left *unsaid*.

That she could ever be the wife of Vere was hopeless ; but she would rather now, by ten thousand degrees, that their farewell had been without that fatal sting in it, which must infallibly make him think the less of her, and that she was as selfish and as worldly as what Kyrle Desborough called 'her set.'

The girl rushed home, with a heart full of shame and upbraiding, to her room, locked herself in it, and fell on her bed in a passion of tears and unuttered reproaches.

Should she write ere it was too late? No; it would be futile now, the deed had been done!

'Let Fate have its way,' she thought, as the image of her mother rose before her; 'but the heart knoweth its own bitterness.'

CHAPTER IX.

KYRLE DESBOROUGH AS A 'COMFORTER.'

As he turned away Herbert Vere lifted his hat, and allowed the cool breeze of the winter evening to play about his heated and throbbing temples.

Thrown over for Jocelyn Derinzy, thought he—the fop, the fool, the debauchee, who had dared to use his name—a use some version of which might reach the ear of Gertrude, whom in his heart he could not relinquish after all that had just passed between them. How deep was the bootless wrath he cherished, and cherished in vain, situated as he was, being so junior in rank, and with that rank at the mercy of his enemy and rival, if he indulged in any just and indignant, but jealous, fiasco!

Gertrude had hinted of some extraordinary pressure 'other' than that of Lady Templeton being put upon her; and in the anger and gloom of his mind Vere deemed this must be, in some way, the influence of Derinzy; of monetary matters he never dreamed.

The kisses, the embraces, the clasp of her hand, and all the tender details of that passionate interview, seemed graven on the very brain of Vere, and were destined to haunt him for many a day to come, as the fact that they had existed, with the mutual avowals and confidences, made a tie between them. Yet he would haunt her and taunt her no more.

Her mother's insane pride of ancestry and inordinate desire for titles, as much as wealth, were quite beyond him. That Gertrude loved him was certainly ground for hope; but in

hope he would indulge no more, after all he had seen, for she had literally discarded him—bade him adieu ; and henceforth in this world their paths, like their graves, must lie far apart.

The camp was some miles distant, yet the report of the evening gun from Gun Hill came distinctly on the breath of the frosty wind over the level heaths and fields of that part of Hampshire, and sounded as a hint to Vere that the world, at Aldershot as elsewhere—the busy, cruel, heartless, and work-a-day world—was going on pretty much as usual ; so he awoke from his reverie, and set out on his return.

Around him the scenery was flat and depressing, and doubly depressing now seemed the blackness of the evening, the mud of the past day's storm of rain and sleet, and the dead leaves of the departed year, that lay thick in the cart-ruts and under the bare brown hedgerows.

On entering his hut and procuring a light, the first object that attracted his attention was a letter in a black-edged envelope, addressed to himself in an unpleasantly business looking handwriting, which, though formal, seemed not unfamiliar. It was from Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, of Gray's Inn, his uncle's solicitors, and he tore it open.

‘ This may resolve all—may turn all in my favour yet.’

His uncle, Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, whose favourite nephew he had ever deemed himself, ‘ had died at Mentone, bequeathing by will about £100,000, all he possessed in money, and movable property, plate, pictures, etc., to you——’

‘ To me ! Bravo, dear old Uncle Joe ! how I always loved him !’ exclaimed Vere ; ‘ but—but,’ he turned the leaf, ‘ a codicil leaves everything thus disposed to his housekeeper, to whom, it appears, he had been privately married, and who nursed him on his death-bed, while all that is heritable goes with the baronetcy, of course, to the next heir, your elder cousin.’

How cruel, how bitter was this disappointment !

His hand trembled violently as he read over the brief and

legal scrawl, and then held it to the candle till it was consumed to ashes.

'So, so,' he muttered ; ' matters are no better, but no worse, than they were, save that all "expectations," as my Lady Templeton would call them, are gone ; and there is nothing for it now but pipeclay for life.'

Bitter though we have said the disappointment was after turning over that fatal leaf, it fell lighter on the heart of Vere after the bitterness of his late interview with Gertrude, to which he would revert again and again, during the conversation that ensued with Kyrle Desborough, who anathematised Uncle Joseph and his designing housekeeper in no measured terms.

'It is a strange coincidence,' said Vere, 'that, for the first time, to-night she asked me if I had heard from Sir Joseph lately ; and here comes this letter.'

'Nothing strange at all,' said Desborough, as he struck a match viciously and lit a cigar ; 'they have seen his death in some fashionable paper ; the rooms of these lawyer fellows in Gray's Inn adjoin those of the family solicitor, and Mère Templeton knows thereby the whole *carte du pays*.'

'Oh, that is a wild speculation, Kyrle, and I cannot think so meanly of Gertrude, with all her tears and tenderness, that she could be under such influences.'

'All acting,' persisted the cynic ; 'they like it.'

'Ah, Kyrle, you know not how I love her !'

'And this is the result. With all the coquetry of a flirty young girl, she, knowing right well her mother's views—perhaps necessities—has lured you into a proposal to gratify her own vanity, and then put you off—coarsely thrown you over, by Jove !'

'I have loved her tenderly and truly !'

'Begging a glove from her hand, a bud from her bouquet, a stray ringlet of hair, to cherish and treasure and have buried with you—placed next your heart, and all that sort of thing. I know it well ; but I am past all such perilous stuff now. Do you remember what Francis I.—he who declared that a

court without ladies was like a spring without flowers—wrote with his ring upon a window in the old gloomy palace of Rambouillet?

“‘Lovely sex, too given to range ;
Lovely sex, too prone to change ;
Alas, what man can trust your charms,
Or seek his safety in your arms?’”

‘Hackneyed,’ retorted Vere, uncorking a bottle of Moselle.

‘Not at all—don’t believe you ever heard the verse before. But to return to the melody. If Derinzy is the real god of her idolatry, she will deserve all the misery a marriage with such a fellow can bring upon her.’

‘Don’t say so, Kyrle.’

‘Come now, don’t be a softy, but let me congratulate you on your escape. In this age of double-dealing, of veneer, of paper collars and electro-plate, what can you expect?’ continued Desborough, who was giving vent to one of his gusts against society. ‘You think, no doubt, that the fair Gertrude is not electro, but the genuine article, stamped with a coronet. Nobility—pshaw! I am not a Radical—a man of my family and means never is—but I do believe, with Burns, that “rank is but the guinea stamp,” and “a man’s a man for a’ that.” And, moreover, I think that not a few of the boasted nobility of England deserve to be sent back to “the vile dust from whence they sprung,” if gambling, blacklegism, crimes on the turf and in every way against honour and morality, can degrade a class! I have known more than one noble snob in my time.’

‘By Jove, Kyrle, it must be this strange and distorted spirit or view of yours that renders you so oblivious of the preference and attractions of such a girl as Rosamund Templeton.’

‘I am not oblivious, but I have a strong idea of the defects of her mother and sister—Maud at least.’

‘But you would not marry them?’

‘Nor any one else, old fellow.’

‘What the deuce has come to you, Kyrle? you’ve been soured in your youth.’

Desborough twirled his heavy dark moustache and was silent, while there crept into his handsome face an expression that rendered Vere silent too. It spoke of scorn, hauteur, and sorrow ; so even the gay lady-killer Desborough *had* his secret and his untold story.

'There are many lovable and right-minded women in this world, Kyrle,' said Vere.

'Very probably, but they don't come much in my way ; and moreover, I don't believe in household angels. But, granting what you aver, what does Wilkie Collins say on such matters as yours ?'

'I cannot tell, and don't care.'

'Ah, but you should. "You choose a cigar, you try it, and it disappoints you. What do you do upon that ? You throw it away and choose another. Now observe the application. You choose a woman, you try her, and she breaks your heart. Fool, take a lesson from your cigar-case ! Throw her away and try another !"' After the spring drills have licked us into shape—not that the Eighth or King's ever require to be so—we shall leave this hole, called Aldershot, behind us, and, amid fresh woods and pastures new, you will forget all about Gertrude Templeton, and find the idea that there is only *one* woman in the world for you at least mighty absurd, my boy. And now I think we have talked enough on this matter to-night.'

As Kyrle departed it seemed to Vere that he had been somewhat of a 'Job's comforter' after all.

In his present mood Vere shunned even the jovial mess, for there the usual light-heartedness of all would have jarred upon his nerves, so he preferred to mope and moon in the solitude of his hut ; and this he did far into the night, long after 'roll' had been called atattoo and the orderly sergeants had seen the gas-lamps extinguished—at that season at eleven. In his easy-chair, without thinking of bed, he sat sunk in his own corroding thoughts, undisturbed by the sentries challenging the reliefs, the measured tread of the latter as they passed ; crushed by the double blow that had come upon him, he heard

not even the boom of the morning gun, or the rattle of the drums and the sweet shrill fifes playing the *reveille*; he had not heard even a row in the adjacent lines, which had actually brought the inlying picket under arms, when some fellow obnoxious to certain tipsy youngsters of his corps had resisted being 'drawn,' and fiercely resented a quart bottle of ink being put into his shower-bath, which turned him into a species of Othello, and prevented his appearance on parade till he had been operated upon by the doctor with a lemon.

Feverish alike in mind and body, he continued to toss restlessly in his chair till utter exhaustion induced sleep, and he slumbered heavily; yet not so much as to be without some dreams that were bright and happy enough to make life seem darker and gloomier when he awoke, and he was suddenly roused by his astonished servant saying loudly:

'Officers' call has sounded, sir; the adjutant is telling off the battalion!'

Then he had to change his dress, accoutre, and rush to parade, or he would have the colonel, as the saying is, 'jumping down his throat with his spurs on.'

During the past hours of that feverish and dreary night, while he had been thinking of Gertrude, Vere could scarcely have realised the idea, or adopted the conviction, that she had been sleepless too and thinking of him. She had sat long at the window of her room, muffled in a fur-lined robe, long after her fire had died out and she should have been abed, gazing dreamily in the direction where, some five miles off, she knew the great camp lay.

The night was serene, and the bright stars looked calmly down from the blue dome of heaven, as if in their silent and peaceful beauty contrasting with the bitterness of the hollow world below them. The winter breeze had died away, and all was still. The long shadows of the trees in the avenue, and of King James's oak, were cast by the waning moon across the frosty sward of the park, and there was a depth of stillness in everything that left her heart all undisturbed in the consciousness of her first great sorrow—of her first

humiliation ; for in her heart and conscience Gertrude felt that, in acting to Vere as she had done, under the influence of family circumstances and the artificial requirements of 'her set,' she had acted vilely and ungenerously. But the act was now, so far as she was concerned, beyond her recall.

And so she sat there, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, acting—even as he was doing in his hut—over and over again, in fancy, that interview by the stile ; for Gertrude was unselfish by nature, though not so by training and the habits of her circle ; and she wept as she thought of the happiness that now could never be realised, and sadness stole over her musings as 'she pondered the solemn questions which have ere now presented themselves to many a mourning spirit, and longed to penetrate the secrets of the grave, and learn things which death alone can teach us.'

CHAPTER X.

A LETTER LOST AND FOUND.

'HE will call after the ball at least,' was the thought of Gertrude next day.

Vere did *not*—men are not entirely masters of their own time at Aldershot ; thus some days elapsed ere he could send cards with Toby Finch and Clive, while to Rosamund's great disappointment—almost dismay—Desborough did the same. He too was on duty ; 'but we are always on duty at Aldershot,' added Toby.

Vere would too probably call no more, thought Gertrude ; and, after all that had happened, situated as they were, what good could accrue from their ever meeting again ?

Poor Rosamund, with all her loveliness, was not like many young girls, who, after that or any other ball, could, with intense self-complacency, find much gratification in conning over their engagement-card and counting the lists of conquests—or victories of those dreary, vapid, and languid youths in funereal evening costume, with parted hair and lisping tongue, who implored the favour of her hand for certain

dances. She had only looked at her programme to count how often the name of the heedless Kyrle Desborough was scrawled thereon, and to treasure it in consequence, for had he not her glove?

'As for Mr. Finch,' said Lady Templeton, after the two visitors had bowed themselves out and ridden off, 'I understand he has nothing but his pay and his debts; yet, Rosamund, you danced with him four times the other night.'

'He has more than you say, mamma,' said Maud.

'More?'

'Yes, he has love for the turf, unlimited loo, and no doubt a thorough knowledge of good wine and good cigars.'

'Oh, Maud, how can you speak thus?' expostulated Gertrude, in a tone of irritation. 'Mr. Finch is a gentleman in every way, and of a long descent too, for he comes of the Sussex Finches of Henry VI.'s time.'

'Gertrude,' said Lady Templeton, 'you seem almost excited. Such displays of emotion are bad form, very; and what can it possibly matter to us who or what this person is?'

'But surely, mamma, such remarks as those of Maud are worse in form and taste too!' replied Gertrude, as she retired into an oriel, where she sat *distracte*, and reading a book—upside down—till suddenly Maud, who had been idling over a newspaper, raised her voice, a thin one at all times, as if she had lighted on something important, and then read aloud a notice, under the heading of 'Wills and Bequests,' relative to the 'Will and Codicil of Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, Bart., of Quincey Court, Blankshire, lately deceased at Mentone,' proved by, etc., together with all the intelligence already conveyed by the letter of Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball to the luckless Herbert Vere.

'And there is no word of his favourite nephew?' asked Lady Templeton, her eyes wandering in malicious triumph to Gertrude.

'Not one word. Singular, is it not, mamma?'

'Very.'

A smile was exchanged between the dowager and her eldest

daughter, and then the subject was dropped, as if unworthy of further consideration.

The early days of spring were creeping on, and they passed in their old routine at Ringwood Hall. Like her sister with regard to Vere, Rosamund fully shared, but dared not show, her thirsty craving to hear even the most slender tidings of Desborough, or of his movements. But she was helpless, bound hand and foot as it were; yet the love she bore him protected her against herself, and prevented her from loving others, in the dark time we shall have to record, when she had ever a restless gnawing at her heart, a clamorous fear of expectation, she knew not of what. And it was in those early spring days, when she knew that the now permanently absent Kyrle was immersed in hard drill at the Long Valley, that her intended marriage with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was formally brought again on the *tapis*, and she was informed that he was coming to propose in person. Indeed, the old baronet would have done so long before, but a terrible fit of the gout had enforced a protracted residence amid the woody seclusion of Winklestone.

‘He and I have arranged everything, Rosamund,’ said Lady Templeton; ‘you will be nearly nineteen in August, and we propose that the marriage shall take place in that month, and in town, of course.’

The girl heard her sentence in silence with a heart that felt crushed and unnaturally still.

‘I trust that when Sir Ayling comes here, my dear child,’ resumed the dowager, ‘that you will exhibit no affectation of indifference, of wilfulness, or coquetry. But I know too well that no daughter of mine would have the bad taste to adopt that *rôle*.’

‘Oh, mamma,’ urged the pale and trembling girl, ‘I cannot do what you ask of me—so soon, at least—so very soon. I shall implore him not to marry me yet.’

‘This would be the very affectation against which I warn you,’ said Lady Templeton, thinking of her debts and difficulties with quiet exasperation,

‘And to pretend that I loved him would be an insult to common sense.’

‘And to good taste and morality, Miss Rosamund. I do not expect that any daughter of mine, or of the line of Ringwood Hall, will be so improper, so bad in form, as to love any man until he has placed the wedding-ring upon her finger !’

With this dictum Lady Templeton crested up her haughty and handsome head, with its lace-gear fastened by two large opal pins, and sailed away, leaving Rosamund with her poor little hands buried amid the masses of her golden hair, as she bent her face over the nearest table and gave way to a passionate outburst of weeping ; for so potent by early habit of submission to it had the power of her mother become, that, ruled as she had thus been from her merest childhood, she felt unable to resist.

‘Oh, that papa had lived, or that Kyrle Desborough would save me !’ she whispered to herself. But the late Lord Templeton had been as much a slave to the will of his wife as her children had become ; and as for Kyrle, he had, notwithstanding all the hints of Vere, no more idea of the passionate love his half-mocking tenderness—for it was no better—with all his assumed earnestness, had kindled in the girl’s heart than of what was being transacted in the moon.

It seemed, to those who heard of it, a dreadful fate for this bright little creature, who was all heart, enthusiasm, and romance ; who, when at Ringwood Hall, was never without some hoydenish excuse to rush out of doors as she had been wont to do when she trundled her hoop on the terrace—now it was a blackbird or lark singing, or the perfume of the rosaries, the moon rising above Twiseldown Hill, the sun setting behind the spire of the village church, or the twilight or the starlight ; and all the buoyancy and freshness of this young heart were to be chilled and crushed for ever in the lap of age and winter.

Oh, what a contrast between Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, so wan and worn, so feeble in gait and slouching in figure, and Kyrle

Desborough, in his dark handsome beauty and free bearing in the full glory of his middle manhood!

‘Oh, what is this life that is before me—destiny, fate, chance, or what?’ wailed Rosamund. Then she would muse, and leaning her throbbing brow upon a little white hand, strove to think coherently. But a terrible passage she had read in a book, a passage most applicable and apposite to herself and her situation, seemed ever to be before her. It was on marriage, and urged that to wed one man whilst loving another was the most serious and grievous fault a woman could commit. ‘It involves double treachery and cruelty,’ said this casuist; ‘it involves wounding the spirit, withering the heart, perhaps blighting and soiling the soul of one who is abandoned and betrayed. It involves the speedy disenchantment of the one who is mocked by the shadow when he is promised the substance, and who grasps only the phantom, soulless beauty, and the husk, the shell, the skeleton of a dead affection. It entails ceaseless deception at home and abroad, by day and by night, at down sitting and at uprising; deception in every relation; deception in the tenderest and most endearing moments of existence. It makes the whole of a life a weary, degraded, and unrewarded life. A right-minded woman can scarcely lay deeper sin upon her soul, or one more certain to bring down a fearful expiation.’

In this she read her fate, her future—the fate into which her mother and her mother’s necessities thrust her.

About this time Gertrude was relieved of Colonel Derinzy’s society, and well-nigh daily visits, for a space. The colonel had begun to fear some ‘doocid row’ about Phœbe Bagshaw, if his little affair cropped up again; and so, perhaps, leaving Vere to face any *esclandre* on the subject as best he might, he got a few weeks’ leave and went up to town, whither the girl flatly refused to accompany him.

The colonel’s exchequer at present was shaky. He had backed the wrong horse at the last Derby for an enormous amount, and had got a heavier book on the race than ever he had before. At the last Newmarket meeting he was hit hard,

and as he was unable to hedge on the first hint, he was, as he averred, 'in a hole.'

'As for Derinzy,' said Desborough to Vere, when the spring drills began, 'you'll require to be careful, my boy. He won't likely forget the visit you paid him that morning, and the complimentary things you said to him. So he'll have ample opportunities, as a staff colonel, of nagging you and seeking his revenge. So keep a bright look out, Vere, old man !'

But Derinzy's departure freed Vere of this dread ; and ere he returned, and ere the course of drills were fairly over, the state of events had altered the relative situations of several of our *dramatis personæ*.

Not many weeks after Vere had been reading the letter of the legal sharks, which crushed his hopes more than even the fears of Gertrude, or the ambitious doctrine of her mother, the latter was perusing *another* epistle, the terrible effect of which upon the former, and on their affairs altogether, he could little have conceived.

On the day subsequent to Derinzy's farewell visit there was found in the conservatory—where, by the date, it was supposed to have lain a considerable time—a letter on note-paper, without an envelope, thus compelling the finder, who was Maud Templeton, to read, which she did, with various mingled emotions, in which mischief and satisfaction were perhaps the highest ; and then she rushed away in search of her mother.

Without troubling the reader with a verbatim copy of this scrawl—for such it was : ungrammatical and ill-spelled, but not without some pathos of expression, born of the painful circumstances under which it was written—the letter proved to be from Phœbe Bagshaw to Herbert Vere, beginning with 'My dear, dear Mr. Vere,' and ending with 'Your despairing Pheebie,' in which she bitterly upbraided him with delaying their marriage, after all his vows and promises, adding, in touching terms, that their story could no longer be concealed ; and if he did not save her from the fury of her father, the old keeper, who was a proud, cruel, and passionate man, she would cast herself into the nearest canal.

With what elation my Lady Templeton laid this precious document before the startled and horrified Gertrude may be imagined. Sorrow, disappointment, humiliation, and disgust—disgust of the man who had showered those passionate kisses on her lips and eyes, and who had poured into her ears those tender speeches, known to herself alone—coursed rapidly through her mind; and disdaining to notice the malicious expression that glittered in the proud and serenely scornful eyes of Maud, she said after a time, and having read the epistle more than once, though half-blind with tears that did not fall, she said calmly:

‘I beg your pardon, mamma—beg it sincerely, for all the annoyance I have given you concerning this gentleman. Oh, perfidy!’ she added in her heart, ‘what an escape I have had!’

‘I am seldom wrong in my first judgments, my dear Gertrude, and I never liked this person Vere from the first moment I saw him disposed to be attentive to you.’

‘That is all over now, mamma,’ said the girl sadly, yet calmly.

‘There will be no necessity for ordering his name to be struck off the list of visitors, as, since the ball, he has unaccountably ceased to be one.’

‘Doubtless Miss Phœbe Bagshaw can account for this,’ said Maud. ‘Of course you will have her turned off the estate?’

‘Her father is an old and faithful servant; we must remember that on one hand, and we are not supposed to be cognisant of his daughter’s affairs on the other. It is fortunate that none of the servants found this,’ she added, tossing into the fire the letter which had dropped from the pocket of the colonel—perhaps drawn forth with his handkerchief on the day of his last visit to Ringwood Hall.

‘And *this* is the man for whom I have despised Jocelyn Derinzy, and for whom I have been burning out my own heart!’ thought Gertrude.

‘Ah,’ said Lady Templeton, as if reading in her daughter’s

face the bitter thought that passed through her mind, 'he is one of the middle class, and they are not much unlike the *canaille*, my love.'

'O mamma,' exclaimed Gertrude, placing her interlaced fingers above her head and looking upward, as if the dream of her life had departed, 'do with me now as you will!'

'Then you will accept Derinzy, darling, when his monetary affairs are quite settled, and his dear old grandfather, the viscount, arranges the increase to his allowance as heir to the title.'

Lady Templeton's voice became almost tender as she spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

'GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE!'

BOISTEROUS March had succeeded February, and Valentine's-day had brought its usual playful reminders to sundry subs. at Aldershot, in the form of penny naked dolls duly labelled, red herrings in collar boxes, or it might be a box of soot, side by side with hothouse camellias and violets in lace-paper; and Desborough had received a single white-kid glove, without having the most remote idea from whom it had come, or remembering that it might be—nay was—the neighbour of the one so heedlessly begged from Rosamund Templeton on the night of the ball. But March had come, bringing with it the burst of freshness, the spirit of tenderness, that the life of the new season infuses in the breasts of all; for then the fields and upland slopes are becoming greener, the buds are swelling in hedge and tree, the carol of the lark sounds louder amid the blue air, and the blackbird and thrush respond joyously to each other from the topmost boughs. Now the lengthening days proclaimed that the hunting season was drawing to its close; and Vere had remarked that since that morning referred to in our opening chapter, when a frost had

spoiled the scent and stopped the hunt, the Ringwood carriage had been absent from every meet: thus Vere had looked for it in vain.

Should he ever see *her* again? he asked of himself.

There seemed no chance of that, as in a Hants paper a paragraph announced that the family had left the Hall for London, where Derinzy was lingering still on extended leave.

‘Gone to London at this season—for what?’ said Desborough.

Vere’s heart not unnaturally suggested settlements and trousseau; for what else could take them up to town when nothing in particular was on the *tapis*? Yet his present alarm was a false one; the visit was merely a flying one; even their West End mansion was not opened; and he was destined to see her once again ere he left Aldershot; and that unexpected meeting nearly obliterated all the tenderness of the twilight interview by the lonely stile.

One evening towards the end of the month, when he and Finch had returned after a ride as far as Basingstoke, past that same stile between the hedgerows, which to Finch was only associated with the throwing off of the hounds, but to Vere was painfully connected with the ‘throwing off’ of himself, they were met by Desborough, who came hurrying from the mess-hut to meet them.

‘Hurrah!—heard the news?’ he asked breathlessly.

‘News!’ repeated Vere, whose heart vibrated painfully with one thought; ‘what news? We’ve been out of camp since morning parade. What is up?’

‘We’re off to the West Indies, old fellow; that is all.’

‘This is a joke, Kyrle; we are not due for foreign service just yet.’

‘Fact, though, my boy; it is in this evening’s orders. Three companies under me—*me*, my man—start at once for Jamaica, *via* Southampton!’

‘Why three?’

‘The rest of the battalion to follow, if required.’

‘Required for what?’

‘The suppression of an expected shindy among the niggers; some artillery go with us. Thank Heaven, we’ll escape the silver dust of the Long Valley—dust worse than that of Delhi—the sham-fighting, and field-mañœuvres, anyhow. Dismount, and we’ll have a quiet drink over it.’

In the assembly-room of the mess-hut all the officers of the battalion had already gathered, and were discussing the news, mostly through the medium of many brandy-and-sodas, and Vere found Kyrle’s news, which he was at first disposed to view as a hoax, fully confirmed; their company and two others were actually detailed to depart at once, and under Kyrle as senior captain.

‘So, my boy, the devil a doubt about it,’ added that officer gaily.

‘I wish it had been for Bengal,’ said Clive.

‘Why? we’ve had enough of Bengal,’ said a red-faced captain.

‘Because the Bengal side of the punkah is the best—you know the saying.’

‘By Jove, it is all one to me!’ shouted Toby Finch, as the mess-waiter poured him out a foaming glass of seltzer-and-curaçoa; ‘one requires money or credit to carry on the civil war here; and unluckily I have more of the latter than the former, and the sooner I’m off to see the world again, the better.’

‘In three days we shall be gone,’ said some one reflectively.

‘Much may be done in three days,’ exclaimed Kyrle. ‘Why, man alive, I started for service against the hill tribes from Bahar on a three hours’ notice, and that during the hot season, when the west wind is scorching, and the water nearly boiled in the men’s canteens. Now our nags must go to Tattersall’s, unless some confiding fellows take them off our hands here. But we’ll have enough to do—outfits to select for self and men, baggage to reduce, and love-letters to burn——’

'Yours, Kyrle, will make a blaze like that of old Marshal de Bassompierre,' said Clive.

'They were numerous, then?'

'About six thousand, somebody has it.'

'By Jove, Clive has been cramming for a little exam.,' said Kyrle. 'There goes the dressing-drum for mess—the last day but one that we shall dine together for a while, and have,' as he sang, with a full mellow voice,

' "One bumper at parting, though many
Have been at this board since we met ;
The fullest, the saddest of any
Remains to be quaffed by us yet." '

As a soldier accustomed to the exigencies of the service, with all its sudden starts and transitions, this unexpected order for the West Indies did not take Vere by surprise. With the enforced and active occupation it gave him among his men, it rather afforded a relief and refuge from his own thoughts ; yet all was past, he deemed — long since past and over—between him and Gertrude Templeton ; and the sooner the sea rolled between them, the better. Still, as he thought this in bitterness of heart, he could not regret that he had ever met or learned to love her.

The preparations for departure were all the more elaborate that the detached companies were starting for the West Indies at the wrong end of the year, and not in October, the month when troops usually embark for these tropical isles, and for Africa, Malta, and Gibraltar.

The necessary lists were made up of the officers and men, with a separate one of the women and children to be embarked, in order that each person might be entered on the ship's books, and that not an hour's delay might take place in the issue of their provisions. Then there were the embarkation returns, with the number of arms, accoutrements, and the quantities of clothing, camp equipage, ammunition, and so forth, and providing the men with coarse canvas frocks or other fatigue dresses to wear while on board the transport ;

and many other details to civilians unknown, including the little bill for 'barrack damages' done to John Bull's princely huts in the North Camp.

The eventful day soon came; the baggage had already gone, with the artillery, by rail to Southampton; and on a fine sunny morning, after the men had breakfasted, the three companies of the Eighth or King's fell in before the lines of the First Division, fully accoutred and in heavy marching order, with their great coats rolled on the top of the knapsacks, as was then the fashion, their canteens and haversacks, for the last inspection of the colonel and brigade-major, whose duty it was to see them marched from the camp to the railway station, punctually as the hour was clanged by the famous Sebastopol bell, on which the hours are, or were, announced to the troops at Aldershot. They mustered some 250 bayonets—all handsome, well-trained, and stalwart young fellows, and all in the highest animal spirits; and thus even Herbert Vere caught the infection from those around him.

Arrivals at, and departures from Aldershot, are too common to excite general interest either in the vast double camp or its vicinity; but our battalion of the Eighth had been popular both among the thousands quartered there and in the neighbourhood. Nearly all the officers were fond of field sports, rode well to hounds, and all had given more than one brilliant ball; thus the sudden movement of the companies in question excited much speculation. It was an important matter for those who were left behind and were soon to follow; and thus there was an unusual gathering to see them off.

A crowd of soldiers belonging to many regiments assembled for this purpose; among them might be seen more than one woman or girl, with eyes red and inflamed by weeping—the wife or sweetheart who was inexorably to be left behind.

'I hope the rest of the regiment will soon follow,' said Kyrle to the adjutant, after the inspection at open order with fixed bayonets was over.

'Then you evidently hope, Desborough, that the shindy with the niggers won't be soon over ?'

'Of course not. Why the blazes should we go out for nothing ? But here comes the band—and now good-bye to everybody.'

'God speed, Captain Desborough !' cried some of those who were left behind, waving their forage-caps, for Kyrle was a favourite officer.

'Good-bye, boys ! God bless you all !'

'Hurrah !' mingled with the crash of the band, as the companies broke into sections of fours and proceeded past the long line of huts, vehemently cheered ; and at the entrance of the camp fresh shouts greeted them from a crowd of rustics and other civilians, who accompanied them on the Farnborough road, when the echoing woodlands replied to the strains of 'Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye !' but save among the poor women referred to, who strove to keep abreast of certain sections, and pressed some fellow's hand ever and anon, or perhaps affectionately retained it, nothing but jollity was seen and laughter heard on every side.

As the companies drew near the railway station and were halted for a few minutes, and while the engine of their special train was giving the usual preliminary snorts, one or two private carriages were drawn up by the wayside to let their occupants observe the scene. So occupied was Vere by the complaints or requests of a number of soldiers' wives who crowded about him, that these few minutes nearly elapsed before he saw that one of those vehicles was the carriage of Lady Templeton.

With something of resolute indifference to what either of her younger girls might feel, she and Maud had contrived to combine a visiting expedition to Basingstoke with a view of the departing soldiers ; so they duly came in the magnificent family chariot, with its hammercloth covered with armorial bearings, which—like the noble pair of three-hundred-guinea steppers that drew it, all flecked with foam under the chafing of the bearing-rein, the coachman with wig and bouquet,

and the two tall powdered footmen—were all a portion of the state that still survived the late lord of Ringwood Hall.

Kyrle Desborough was going—in a few minutes more would be gone for ever—and two ideas filled the soul of Rosamund Templeton: she would never, never see him again, too probably; and he did not love her. Of that she was becoming convinced at last. Pride and dignity had evaporated, and, in the fulness of her great passion—a passion mixed with self-upbraiding—the poor child, as she watched him bustling about, sword in hand, with his V.C. and medal on his breast, with all its clasps—the ladder of glory (or of poverty, as Maud more wisely deemed it)—Rosamund was repeating and thinking to herself:

‘He is going away—away to the West Indies—to Jamaica, and I shall see him no more; and I love him so! It is hard to bear—hard to bear! How mean I am! Oh, if Maud knew all—and of that kiss! Why did he not speak then? Was it fear of mamma? Just a word; after that kiss Kyrle might have told me anything. If he did not love, why dared he to kiss me? and if he loved me, why did he not say so?’

Poor little Rosamund knew nothing of Madame de Staël, yet she thought with her that ‘love is only an episode in a man’s life. It is the whole object of a woman’s.’ Then ever recurred the thought, Did Desborough love her, but feared her mother’s ambition? He was going away to where he would form new and other ties, and thus in the years to come—the vista that looks so long to a girl of eighteen—she would fade utterly out of his memory. She had not even touched his fancy, and would pass out of it for ever, even as the echoes of the departing drums would die away upon the road. ‘What a fool I am!’ she would think, with a bitter smile; ‘but I cannot help it—I cannot help it; I am a poor weak little thing!’

Suddenly the eye of Vere caught the carriage with its occupants. There they sat, Lady Templeton and Maud on one side, and Gertrude and Rosamund with their backs to

the portly old bewigged coachman, fresh, serene, and bright-eyed, fair in face and graceful in form, with toilettes that were perfection, looking as only highly-bred Englishwomen can look, with Sir Ayling, the genuine type of an antiquated beau, mounted on a quiet old roadster, beside them, and a very feeble escort he seemed.

As Kyrle Desborough commanded the departing troops, Vere led his company, and, under the strictness of Aldershot discipline, he could not then quit his place in the ranks to say even a word of farewell, and he somehow signally failed to catch the eyes of any of the Templeton party; even old Sir Ayling ignored him, which was perplexing, as he knew that the few officers of the detachment must be conspicuous enough.

He was pained as well as perplexed; they seemed to look over, past, or anywhere but at him! He had hoped for at least a farewell bow from all—for a parting smile—a sad one perhaps from *her*; but when he was at last enabled to approach, and their eyes, as if by fascination, *did* meet, she accorded him a quiet and serene, but brief, stare of utter non-recognition, and—turned her gaze away!

Vere fell back into his place, and a full minute elapsed ere he became aware that Toby Finch was talking to him.

‘And that is Aldwinkle with them,’ he was saying; ‘by Jove, a game old gentleman.’

‘If he heard you, you would never have your legs under his mahogany again,’ said Clive.

‘Never likely I shall, so what are the odds? The chief thing I respect about the old fellow is his perfect taste in burgundy and cigars. I tasted both when covert shooting at Winklestoke.’

Vere looked towards the carriage of the Templetons no more; but his six brother officers, all of whom had enjoyed the hospitality of Ringwood Hall, went forward in succession, bade the ladies adieu, heard them murmur some well-bred good wishes, and then sprang into the train, which shot away

out of the station amid the reiterated cheers of those it bore and of those who beheld it.

Among the women in the crowd who watched their departure, and watched in vain for the tall handsome figure of her betrayer among them, was Phœbe Bagshaw—for Derinzy was still in London.

Amid that crowd were many whose sad eyes followed the swiftly speeding train—eyes that might never again look on those they loved and wept for. Many of these were women in worn and faded attire, and some with children in their arms, but all poverty-stricken ; and these were unfortunate creatures who were either beyond the proportion or number allowed to go per company, or were married without the colonel's leave ; and from these something of a wail of despair mingled with the last cheer of the on-lookers, as the train, diminished to a speck, vanished in the distance.

‘Cut you dead, did she? after all that scene at the stile, by Jove!’ exclaimed Kyrle Desborough to Vere, who had secured a compartment for himself and friend ; ‘bah, old fellow ! you have felt a deeper wound than this.’

‘When?’

‘In the Terai of Nepaul.’

‘The shot there broke my arm, but this shot of hers seems to have broken my heart !’

‘Stuff, man ! how can you run on so ? Hearts don’t break ; it’s all bosh. Look—these walls covered with ivy are the ruins of Basing House, left just as Cromwell’s people battered it.’

But Vere was in no mood for archæology. By that stolid stare it was but too evident that she had schooled herself—if indeed she required schooling, which he now doubted—to renounce him. He felt intense humiliation and bitterness, but little anger, and forced himself to own that he was suffering a greater depth of sorrow than he had yet encountered ; and heedless of all Kyrle’s well-meant and rattling attempts to rouse him, he gave way to reverie, recalling all the sweetness of the past with its hopes, and imagining a future that had

but one idea in it—the figure of Gertrude Templeton for ever blotted out, so far as he was concerned. He was thus indulging in the luxury of griefs real and imaginary, when he was roused by Kyrle shouting :

‘Here’s Winchester—five minutes’ stop for a brandy-and-soda. Rouse yourself, Vere ; if she is able to tolerate, even think of—nay, how much more to love ?—this fellow, Derinzy, is she worthy of *your* affection ? Look alive ; Regulus rolled in his tub of nails is nothing to you ! Jump out—by Jove, there is a stunning girl at the refreshment-bar !’

Under the influence of Desborough, Vere began to feign an indifference which he did not feel, and often smiled to hide his real and secret emotion. Her stony stare haunted him, yet, singular to say, he never in any way connected her changed demeanour with the real source of it. In the course of events he had somehow forgotten his meeting with Phœbe Bagshaw—forgotten even her very existence.

All the rest of that day, however, proved somewhat of a dream to him ; nothing seemed to stand out very prominently but the serene cold glance of Gertrude ; and everything and everybody else came to be vague and misty in outline. And yet it was a day of much bustle, hurry, and excitement.

In speaking of Gertrude to Vere, never once did Desborough mention Rosamund. He was one of those easy-going pleasant fellows who flirt, coquette, dance, say pretty nothings in a pleasing way, yet have no desire to marry any one and relinquish their liberty ; but to whom *the* girl, whether found early or late, becomes all the world at once. She could never be that particular girl to him ; and it was all too late now.

‘Here is the Itchen Viaduct, and there is Southampton,’ said he, as the train glided across the river ; ‘a long good-bye, I hope, to Aldershot. I leave it with all the virtues I possessed when I entered it.’

From the station to the tidal dock, where H.M. steam transport *Bannockburn* lay, with blue-peter flying at the fore,

was but a short distance ; and as Desborough's companies had only drums and fifes, they did not attract much attention ; no great crowd was collected. The soldiers speedily poured along the gangway and were formed up on the main deck, till told off to the berths in the 'lobster-pot,' as the transport was termed by the crews of the adjacent craft.

The berths were soon allotted ; the accoutrements hung up, the arms racked, the watches and guard formed, countless returns signed by Desborough on the table in the cabin, on the head of the capstan, or on the back of any one who chanced to be near ; and then the officers, with those of the artillery, some staff, and others who were going to Jamaica, all adjourned to the nearest hotel, to fraternise and dine together for the last time in old England ; and a jovial dinner they had.

'Ah, Toby, my boy,' said Clive, 'no more runs up to town, and coming down by the cold-meat train.'

'No more quiet little dinners for two at Richmond or Greenwich,' added Kyrle ; 'no sly meetings at St. Paul's, to count the two hundred and sixty steps to the whispering gallery. Poor St. Paul's ! to what strange uses may we come at last !'

'To-morrow must see us on the ocean,' said Toby Finch, whose speech had become somewhat inarticulate ; 'on the deep and dark-blue——'

'Stomach-stirring ocean,' interrupted Kyrle.

'And what then ?' asked Toby sharply.

'You'll be mighty white about the gills, Toby, my boy, and singing dolorously,

• "Steward, hasten, bring a basin ;
What the deuce is ailing me ?
If it's handy, get some brandy----"

But you know the rest.'

That night Vere drank as deeply as any of them, but failed to drown thought. He had been taught a cruel and fatal

lesson—that one he deemed pure and good and true could play a species of double part, and prove fickle, worldly, and insulting ; so the seeds of mistrust—bitter mistrust—were sown and grew fast.

Would they ever wither and die ? Time will show.

The party separated—or broke up—after singing a portion of 'Rule Britannia,' of which no man among them could recollect the whole.

Vere passed a night—or morning rather—of fever and restlessness, and expended countless matches to see how the weary hours succeeded each other, one aching thought ever before him, and sleep rendered still more impossible by the row going on in the hotel, where Finch, Clive, Prior, and other madcaps were having in the corridors and on the staircase a free fight with pillows, snatched sometimes from under the heads of infuriated sleepers, whose boots were shied all over the house ; and for hours, amid singing and laughter, their pranks continued, till day stole in, and brought with it no relief to Vere, for still the bitter sense of mortification, love, and wounded self-esteem were strong within him ; and he was glad when, for change of scene, he could hasten on board the transport, which was now ready for sea, and had all the horses for the artillery slung on board in their horse-hammocks.

The soldiers were all on deck, and many of them looked pale in the light of the morning, for already the order had been given to clear the ship ; and on the quay stood some women weeping—poor creatures who had come all the way from Aldershot to have one more glance at their departing husbands, and more than one held up her baby to poor Tom, or Bill, or Joe, who might never kiss it more.

Many of the soldiers, who had no such regrets or cares to oppress them, looked bright and gay enough, uttering jests on every side ; for they were full of life, and change of scene was before them, whether in Jamaica or Japan was all one to them ; but the gayest there were the group of officers with some ladies on the poop, talking and laughing together like

old friends already, and taking their last view of bustling Southampton.

‘Now then,’ shouted the boatswain, ‘stand by, and clear the gangway! By your leave, gentlemen—by your leave, ladies; all for shore must go at once.’

At that moment a tatterdemalion wild-looking Irishwoman—a poor creature who had evidently travelled far afoot—perhaps all night—too late to bid her son adieu, came rushing along the jetty just as the boatswain spoke. She uttered a shrill shriek as she was rather roughly thrust back from the gangway, while a handsome young soldier, with streaming eyes, waved his cap to her.

Then, oblivious of all around, she cast herself on her knees, with her grey hair dishevelled, and throwing her eyes and bare arms upward, cried in a piercing voice,

‘May God and His blessed mother preserve you, Pat, from danger and evil! And they will too,’ she added, ‘if ye never forget the prayers I’ve taught you.’

‘I’ll look after him, mother,’ cried Kyrle Desborough cheerily. ‘By Jove, Vere,’ he added, ‘poor Paddy forgets many things, but his religion never!’

The gangway was run on shore, a hawser forward thrown off, falling with a splash into the water; while a few revolutions of the screw and a turn of the wheel, grasped by a strong burly fellow, canted the ship’s head to seaward.

‘Cast off that hawser astern!’ cries a voice from the bridge.

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ is the ready response.

It is uncoiled from the timber head, and as it too falls splash into the water, all feel and know instinctively that the last tie with the shore—the last link with old England—is broken, and that they are fairly off.

‘Good-bye, Mary darling!’ cries a soldier.

‘The Lord in heaven bless you, Pat!’ feebly responds a voice from the receding shore, where the figures of the weepers are diminishing fast, for already the middle of the basin has been reached.

Conspicuous on the poop in his scarlet tunic was the tall figure of Kyrle Desborough, waving his cap, not to the crowd of on-lookers, but to those women of the Eighth who were left behind, and among whom, ere he stepped on board, he had emptied the contents of his purse, always an ample one ; for with all his pretended cynicism, there was no warmer heart than Kyrle’s in the service.

Objects on the shore blended fast ; already the tall and slender octagonal tower of St. Michael’s church—that famous landmark for ships—began to sink ; and to the eyes of those who watched her, the mists of the morning gradually shrouded and seemed to swallow up the *Bannockburn*, as with all her living freight she glided down Southampton Water with her head towards Calshot Castle.

The general bustle of the scene on board, the rousing of the fore-and-aft canvas out of its nettings, and setting the topsails when the wind served, the necessity for seeing to the comforts and arrangements of the soldiers below, had the usual mechanical effect on the mind of Vere, and stifled many of those tender thoughts in which he might have indulged amid solitude. But ere long perfect quietness stole over the great ship ; every rope was coiled away in its place, and every man ere midday was past seemed to have settled down into *his* place ; and when the drums beat at sunset, it seemed an illusive dream that Vere was so far from Aldershot, from Ringwood Hall, and all that had so lately filled his thoughts ; and that but four-and-twenty hours had elapsed since he had last looked into the dark-blue eyes of the girl he loved so dearly and so hopelessly.

CHAPTER XII.

JANUARY AND MAY.

A ROMANTIC interest is stirred in every breast when witnessing the departure of troops for foreign service at any time, but more than all in a season of strife ; and how much must

love and affection for one of the departing deepen the interest, especially in the heart of an enthusiastic girl ! Every one travels nowadays, the appliances for which are so cheap and swift ; but every one is not a soldier, and every one is not going far away, to face cannon-balls and rifle-shot !

The statesman, says Major Rankin in his ‘Sketches,’ devotes his time, talent, and health, his days and nights, to his country. ‘Who can appreciate his labours and anxieties, his noble abnegation of self, the magnitude of his sacrifices and his services ? But,’ adds this gallant fellow, the *last* man killed in the Crimea,—‘but the women of Britain—the wives, the mothers, the sisters of soldiers—what do they contribute to the war ? One gives the father of her children ; another her dear son, the pride of her old age ; a third a brother ; a fourth, perhaps one who stood in a dearer relation still, whose loss would crush her young heart, make life a blank to her, and leave her the sorrow, too deep for utterance, of unwedded widowhood.’

If Kyrle Desborough fell, this was what Rosamund would feel herself in her heart to be—an unwedded widow—so fully had the passion for him filled her soul ; yet it was on the very day he quitted Aldershot, for ever, as it proved to many, and when Rosamund saw Kyrle’s handsome dark face and heard his pleasant voice for the last time, that her *bête noire*, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, made his proposal in due form, and nearly as coolly as if he had been rising to address the House.

Seated alone in the recess of one of the many oriels of Ringwood Hall, with her cheek resting on her hand, she was gazing out on the sunny, level landscape, lost in thought, and still seeming to hear in her eyes the hurrahs of the departing soldiers, and the cadence of the band with its farewell airs, when Lady Templeton stood beside her, and, though all unused to tenderness or to the melting mood, even when having her own selfish ends to serve, put one arm caressingly around her.

‘You know for what purpose, my darling child, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle is here ?’ said the dowager.

‘I cannot, I do not dare to think, mamma.’

‘Impossible ; guess !’ (with a grim attempt at being arch).

‘I care not even to guess,’ replied Rosamund wearily ; and her little pale face fell, and she seemed ready to weep, but controlled herself by a disdainful effort.

‘He wrote to you, under cover to me.’

‘I know, mamma.’

‘And you read his letter ?’

‘Scarcely.’

‘In that letter he announced that he would see you personally, and propose.’

‘Yes.’

‘Think of his enormous wealth, my dear, and of what that can do for us *all*. Your papa, Rosamund, was as obstinate as a mule before I married him ; poor Sir Ayling has no will of his own, and you might do anything with him——’

‘But love him.’

‘Love has nothing to do with the matter in hand.’

‘Nothing whatever, certainly, on my part, at least.’

‘Nor should it, until you are married. He will formally propose for your hand to-day. You must have expected this ?’

‘Yes, mamma,’ said the girl, shivering ; ‘but oh, dearest mamma, he is *so* old !’

‘All the better ; he will be a quiet, easy-going, respectable husband, whose wild oats were sown long ago.’

‘Yes, very long ago !’ thought Rosamund contemptuously.

‘Your position, even as the daughter of Lord Templeton, will be vastly improved, for his settlements are magnificent. But here he comes, and—I shall leave you.’

And quietly, as if she had been acting a part in ‘genteel comedy,’ *exit* Lady Templeton, leaving her daughter very miserable and with many conflicting thoughts.

Sir Ayling approached the girl with a little would-be juvenile skip, and a bright simper rippling over the puckers of his colourless old face ; while Rosamund, in rapid succession, became pale, then red, then pale again ; then flurried

and trembling, cold and weary, and finally defiant ; for, as if by very contrast, there came vividly before her the handsome face and figure of the soldier she had seen that morning, with his delightful voice, gallant bearing, and high animal spirits—the man who, she believed in her heart, loved her, yet feared, for her mother, to avow it. Thus, for a time, stronger grew the spirit of defiance in the heart of the girl, but it was a spirit fated not to last.

‘You—you got my letter, Miss Rosamund?’ said Sir Ayling, drawing near her a chair, and jauntily seating himself thereon.

‘Yes, under cover to mamma.’

‘Precisely so, under cover to mamma ; and what have you thought of it?’ he asked insinuatingly.

‘That it was droll.’

‘Droll?’ his heart beat, but not with pleasure ; ‘droll?’ he added. ‘Come now, my dear Miss Rosamund——’

‘Yes, Sir Ayling,’ replied Rosamund, beating the carpet with her pretty foot, and with difficulty restraining her tears, as he took one of her plump little hands between his very white but thin and shrivelled fingers.

‘Was it not clear in its purport?’

‘Quite.’

‘Rosamund, dearest Rosamund—but may I call you so?’

‘Do.’

‘Thanks, darling.’

‘Papa always called me so.’

Though quite apposite, this remark of Rosamund’s was unpleasant, and a shade of annoyance crossed the aristocratic old face of the lord of Winklestoke.

‘But what were you about to add to your letter?’ asked Rosamund, facing him fully, as if brought to bay.

The same noonday sun that streamed in broad beams through the oriel, lighting up the golden hair of the young girl, who was not yet in the noon of life, and was naturally buoyant in spirit, bright and beautiful as the Aurora of Guido, also lighted up, but as if with silver frost, the thin white hair

and withered cheek of 'the lean and slippered pantaloon' who addressed her; though he did not wear slippers then, but glazed boots, the daintiest that Regent Street could produce.

'What more have you to say to me than the letter contained?' repeated Rosamund, as he had paused irresolutely.

'That all my future happiness depends upon your reply to it.'

How much more he had now of the past than of the future, that glorious inheritance of the young!

'I know,' he urged, 'my own unworthiness of your hand and of your heart, though happily it can have formed no other attachment; but every endeavour of my future life shall be to love, to serve, and watch over you.'

She raised her humid eyes from the vacant task of tracing the carpet pattern, and saw that those of the old man were regarding her earnestly, even ardently.

'You may deem that there is some disparity in our years,' continued Sir Ayling, feeling doubtless that it was piteous to have to pay his court in this fashion; 'yet I do not think it impossible that a marriage to be perfectly and serenely happy, without all that rapture—that—that—aw—you know all I mean, described by poets and novelists: those glows of passion which never last, and are often followed by the weariness and disappointment of years. Thus, dearest Rosamund, with your good mamma's permission——'

'O Sir Ayling, why torment me with mamma's permission? What do you—what can you—see in me? I have no heart. I am not good enough for you. In town there are hundreds more suitable for you than I.'

'No, no, my dearest girl; I am surely old enough to know my own mind.'

'Quite; but not old enough to know mine. I must own,' she added, willing to conciliate, 'to having much esteem and great friendship for you, with gratitude for the honour you do me.'

'Surely these sentiments will be changed in time for those

of greater tenderness? They must yield, dear Rosamund, to the ardour of mine.'

She looked in the faded face, with its thin aristocratic nose and brilliantly-white Parisian teeth, and with difficulty restrained an emotion to laugh or to weep, she scarcely knew which.

'I like you in one way well enough, because you are good, kind, gentle, and—and——'

'What, my darling?'

'You remind me of papa.'

Sir Ayling winced again; but he pressed to his lips the hand he held, on which she drew it away; yet, nothing daunted—he had made love to scores in his time, and could do so by rote—he said:

'You will know your own mind ere long, my dear girl. Already, thanks to your mamma and family, I look upon you as my affianced wife: even the petty matter of the settlements has been fully adjusted.'

Rosamund shivered, and muttered:

'Such torment, such tyranny it is—in this age of the world too! O Kyrle, Kyrle, you might have saved me from it, and you would not!'

A strange hardness stole into the expression of her eyes; and Sir Ayling, who watched her attentively, felt himself at a disadvantage—she was so cool, so unimpressed by all his attempted blandishments. Yet he returned to the charge, and, taking her face caressingly between his hands, in a fatherly way, said,

'I will not hurry you, darling: you have to name *the day*; and ere long I shall teach you to love me, and you will be happier when it is all over.'

'All over! Would that I could die!' thought Rosamund, as he printed a cold kiss on her fair forehead, and jauntily tripped away on tip-toe, humming an air, and rubbing his old withered paws, as much as to say, 'Egad, that's all settled at last!'

In her indignant, defiant, and desperate view of the whole

situation, Rosamund had been forgetting all about her promise of obedience to her mother—about the perilous state of their monetary matters, and the threatened shame, ruin, and deprivation of all the state and luxury to which they had, by use and wont, been accustomed as a second nature—till suddenly the whole gulf seemed to open at the feet of the unhappy girl, and, bowing her face upon her hands, she gave way to a passion of bitter tears.

Then, desirous of solitude, and to avoid all her family—even the gentle Gertrude, for she had been changed sorely and strange of late, taking odd views of human nature, and bitter ones of men—she hurried forth and sought the cool recesses of the chase, where all the grand old trees were budding now and bursting into leaf with the tender greenery of spring ; and long she wandered there, sunk in corroding thoughts—on through the tangled wood, by the windings of a tiny stream that joined the Whitewater ; and, seeking to avoid the glare of the sun, she sat down by the root of an old tree, with a hunted expression in her eye, as if some one was pursuing her—sat down in a place surrounded by a literal grove of those bushes from the locality of which the camp obtained its Saxon name—*alder holz*, or the copse of alders.

She felt that to marry Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was her inevitable doom, unless—she knew not what intervened.

Was such a marriage as this her mother had cruelly planned the consummation of that all-engrossing thought which ever fills the bosom of the young, especially the ardent and imaginative, from the monarch on his throne to the peasant at his plough ? Could such be the realisation of that soft dream which makes the pulses of the heart to quicken, the nerves to thrill, and of all that poet, painter, and novelist have striven to depict—of two persons so suited to each other in thought, in heart, and temperament, that their union alone was required to make one perfect and harmonious whole—the union that, if left to God or Nature, and not to man, might become so indeed ?

And then she thought of the cold world, of the tyrannical

bugbear called 'society,' and what would be said of such a marriage when announced in the *Morning Post*, and all were free to canvass its merits and demerits—how the old would pity, the young mock, and both revile, it might be slander, her. Oh, no, no! she would escape if she could—escape; but how? And with this thought she bowed her fair bright head as if the black waves of ruin and misfortune were rolling over it.

Her resolution was speedily taken—a strange, wild, and desperate one. She would write to Kyrle, she thought, and implore him to save her—write to him ere it might be too late. And in the solitude of her own room, with door locked, as if she was engaged in something nefarious—with hot trembling hands, hot throbbing temples, and while her eyes were blinded ever and anon by hot scalding tears—she began a letter to him. But more than twenty were commenced, abandoned, and destroyed ere she could pen one that was sufficiently clear or coherent: even it fell far, far short of what she wished it should be, and it was necessarily without prefix:

'I trust to heaven that this letter may reach you ere your ship, the *Bannockburn*—I have learned its name—leaves Southampton, that you may at least telegraph to me. I care not what people—even mamma—may think, for Kyrle, I am desperate! I entreat you, by the memory of all that you have said to me, in London and here; by the memory of your love for me (for that you love me in secret I never for a moment doubted); by the remembrance of that night at the ball, when you kissed me so tenderly and took away my glove—to save me from the doom before me—a marriage with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle. I know the strangeness, wildness—yes, the madness and impropriety—of such a letter as this; but as your wife, dearest Kyrle, I should be safe from all the world—safe even from mamma——'

Thus far had she got when she grew deadly pale, with

shame at the promptings of her own fear, and tossed the letter, like its predecessors, into the fire, after which she abandoned herself to despair and to her fate. Better would her fate perhaps have been had she sent it.

Cynical as he was in his views of the aristocracy in general, and in those of the morals of their women in particular ; soured and disappointed as he had evidently been in the beginning of his career—had that sweet and brilliant girl's letter come to the hands of Kyrle Desborough, he would certainly, unless barred and hedged in by the exigencies of the service, have done what she wished, and have striven to save her from a terrible fate—a fate in which he was eventually to become himself involved.

But so little was his heart touched then, so little did he suspect the right state of the whole situation, and so little did he think or care on the subject, that at the very time Rosamund was penning that letter in her agony of heart, he was walking to and fro on the poop of the transport, cigar in mouth, and replying laughingly thus to some remark made by Vere about her :

‘Yes, by Jove ! it is a pity for the poor little girl to be compelled to play Juliet to a Romeo in stays and pads, with false teeth and goioshes : January and May in juxtaposition.’

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDECEIVED WHEN TOO LATE.

So it was settled at last that Rosamund Templeton was to be the victim surrendered to Mammon ; and even the family solicitor sighed at the thought, as he dipped his pen in the ink-horn to scheme out the monetary arrangements—the deeds of sale, they might be called.

Gertrude had been upbraiding herself for her treatment of Vere, and of his avowed love for her, when the terrible revelation of his supposed perfidy and base *liaison* with Phœbe Bagshaw came upon her. Thus, in the first instance, acting

in terror of and under pressure of her mother, she had schooled herself to tell him that hopes of successful love between her and himself were vain ; and, in the second, she had again, but with more care certainly, schooled herself to ignore—even to insult him on the day he left Aldershot.

He was gone now, as it seemed most surely for ever, and she sorrowed, in spite of her just anger, that the man she really loved should thus have had the mask of deceit so torn from his face, and his secret life laid bare, as it had been by the discovered letter of such a girl as Phœbe Bagshaw.

Yet her mind ran perpetually upon him, and that it did so was made too apparent, on more than one occasion, to her mother, and, what the latter considered of course much more, even to Colonel Derinzy. Thus one evening, when she was seated at the piano, and the tall staff officer was stroking his long tawny moustache with one hand, and turning over the leaves of her music with the other, while his half-vacant eyes of china-blue wandered approvingly over the braids of her rich brown hair, the form of her little white ears, and the outline of her delicate neck and shoulders, and thinking how ‘a fellah might do worse than show such a wife to society, by Jove—aw, don’t you know,’—Gertrude suddenly—despite the well-bred English horror of a scene on the discovery of any genuine emotion—broke off in the middle of a very creditable performance, and burst into tears.

The colonel was as much amazed as his lazy and languid nature permitted him to be, and Lady Templeton was horrified, but not the least alarmed.

‘Oh, what is this I have been singing?’ she exclaimed.

‘Only a melody from an opera,’ said Derinzy.

‘I am surely very nervous to-night, mamma,’ she urged, endeavouring to laugh.

Unconsciously she had, as Lady Templeton knew, by mere force of habit or by train of thought, been singing one of Herbert Vere’s favourite songs ; and now his name appeared written on the upper right hand corner of the front page thereof.

The colonel raised his fair eyebrows, and muttered, 'By Jove—aw !' and said nothing more.

Gertrude resolved that she would be more careful in future, and Lady Templeton had the same idea ; for when the girl was looking over her music-stand next day, she discovered that every piece given to her by Vere, or which they had been in the habit of singing or playing together, had vanished and gone. She smiled bitterly, and said, with a sigh :

'Perhaps it is better that this should be so ; regrets are alike unavailing and unbecoming now.'

But the saddest heart in Ringwood Hall was that of poor Rosamund, who knew that her grotesque marriage was to take place during the height of the London season ; and she heard, as one in a dream, the voice of the family solicitor reading over the scroll of the princely settlements that were made upon her and 'her heirs,' etc.,—heard them all as if they referred, not to herself, but to some other person. The very *day* was named ; and though she had yet many weeks, respite, it would come inexorably, unless she or Sir Ayling died ; and she looked forward to it as a culprit may to the day of doom.

She saw that Gertrude was not without her own sorrow ; she knew that her sweet sister had lost doubly the only man she ever loved, and was apparently apportioned, destined to become the wife of another, who was totally indifferent to her, and who seemed to be too lazy to love or admire any one but himself.

'My poor Rosamund,' said Gertrude caressingly, drawing the girl's head upon her bosom and interlacing her slender fingers over it, 'I must take a leaf from mamma's book, and lecture you.'

'Surely I have had enough of that, Gerty !'

'Your spirits have fled—you eat nothing,' resumed Gertrude, who felt her sister's hot tears oozing between her fingers ; 'it makes me truly wretched to see you as you are now, and contrast you with the once bright merry girl you were.'

'I was not a slave then—a slave to be sold and bought; my hand was my own, Gerty.'

'Poor tiny hand,' said Gertrude, caressing it; 'white and soft as ever, but it is getting sadly thin. How I wish all this had never, never been, or that it were all over!'

'Over and ended—over and ended!' wailed Rosamund. 'But you, Gerty darling, are not *you* changed too?'

'I have had my own sorrows.'

'And disappointment?'

'Yes, my little pet sister, and disappointment too.'

And now, as they often did, unknown to Lady Templeton, they mingled their tears together, and felt a strange but softening solace in such sad communings and companionship.

Poor Rosamund, whatever she did now—when at dinner, seated in boredom by the side of Sir Ayling as his *fiancée*; at balls (though she strove to avoid them now); at church, when he sat in the family pew; at riding-parties, when he contrasted so unfavourably with others; at polo-parties in the camp, when the young subs, among themselves, made scathing and cutting remarks upon 'the Fair Rosamund and her Lothario'—seemed ever as one in a dream, who acted and lived in this world, yet appeared to belong to another, and to have neither share nor interest in the concerns of this; though such are the enforced exigencies of society that she did her best—her very best—to look and talk and laugh like other people. But, despite all the training of Lady Templeton, she proved an indifferent actress; and her hollow or ghastly attempts at disguise were apparent to all, to none more so than Gertrude, whose heart so bled for her sister's sorrow that there were times when she forgot her own.

And concerning the latter there came a time which she never forgot.

Some notice of Vere's troopship having been passed and spoken with at sea had casually met her eye in a paper overnight, and brought vividly back all the bitter past to her, and she spent a restless and dreamy night.

Unsoothed in mind and unrefreshed in body, she was

roused from a half-waking, half-sleeping state by the morning sun shining brightly into her room, thus destroying all further chance of sleep. The morning was beautiful, for the first days of summer were at hand ; and commencing her toilette quickly and alone, she finished it without summoning her maid, and, impelled she scarcely knew by what, took her garden-hat and sunshade, and went forth for a stroll in the fresh, dewy, and balmy atmosphere.

If she was ever disposed to think less of or to forget the man whom she believed to have deceived her, Ringwood Hall was just the place to have his memory by association of ideas thrust upon her ; for at this season of the year, as it was within a few miles of Aldershot, the roads were teeming with manœuvring troops. Columns of infantry on the march—twice she had seen thus the remainder of *his* regiment, the Eighth ; squadrons of cavalry, galloping with sabres flashing in the sun, swept hither and thither amid whirlwinds of dust ; the commissariat wagons and the brigades of artillery thundered along the highways ; and ever and anon the heavy patter of infantry file-firing or the crashing boom of cannon would announce that some village was surrounded, to the bewilderment of its rustic inhabitants, or that some bridge on the line to Vauxhall or the nearest canal in the mimic warfare had been fiercely contested, till a flag was hoisted thereon in token that it had been ‘blown up,’ or deemed so.

On this morning the call of a distant bugle or trumpet, or the long roll of a brass drum, floating past on the ambient air, showed that the inmates of the North and South Camps were at their usual work of indulging in ‘alarms and excursions ;’ and thinking of the absent, now so far away, she listened rather to these sounds than to the voice of the birds ; for there was no sympathy in Nature for her heavy heart.

Rich masses of light and deep shadows too checkered the solitary path she unconsciously pursued ; and through the openings in the already leafy copsewood came ever and anon picturesque glimpses of old Ringwood Hall, with all its oriel

glittering in the sunshine, cresting the gentle slope of the surrounding lawn, which had been rolled and mown, mown and rolled again and again, till it looked like the richest velvet, and was the pride of the heart of old Davis Dibble the gardener.

Gertrude, lost in reverie, now found that all unconsciously she approached and was close to the stile—the same stile near which she had last met Herbert Vere, and which had so many associations that were sweet and sad for her, till the infusion of bitterness and disappointment came.

By the stile a female figure was seated, apparently lost in thought ; another pace or two showed Gertrude that she was a girl, young, and smartly dressed—too smartly for her station ; and another glance showed that she was Phœbe Bagshaw, the keeper's daughter. Gertrude paused, for she had every way an aversion for and a genuine horror of this girl—an aversion in which perhaps jealousy and envious pride formed a part ; nay, she would have been either more or less than woman had they failed to do so.

Nevertheless, she was compelled to pass her, and was doing so, with her skirt gathered in one hand and the ivory handle of her sunshade twirling impatiently in the other, when Phœbe rose and curtsied deeply ; and then, with an emotion of commiseration, Gertrude perceived that she was in tears—tears that were irrepressible, for she failed to control them, even under her serene and scrutinising eye.

‘ You seem in distress,’ said she.

‘ Yes, Miss Gertrude,’ sobbed the girl, lifting her handkerchief, as if by that means to control her emotion.

‘ Can I—can mamma assist you ?’

‘ No, miss.’

‘ Or advise you ?’ asked Gertrude, with some sternness, or rather coldness, of manner.

‘ No, miss ; no one can advise me or help me now but God !’

‘ You have fallen into error, Phœbe, and repent when too late.’

Phœbe made no reply but by a fresh outburst.

‘Pardon me speaking of your affairs, Phœbe—but I suppose the cause of your grief is Mr. Vere?’

‘Yes—yes, Miss Gertrude.’

The latter felt her heart swelling with indignation against him ; but she said calmly :

‘You see I know your secret, Phœbe—how I came to do so matters not ; but,’ and her lip quivered scornfully as she spoke, ‘of course Mr. Vere has not married you?’

‘No, miss.’

‘Nor is likely to do so, now that he has gone to Jamaica.’

‘Gone to Jamaica !’ repeated the girl, with surprise.

‘Of course—weeks ago ; did you not know that ?’

‘Impossible, Miss Gertrude ; he has *just* left me.’

‘When ?’ asked Gertrude, with genuine astonishment.

‘Now, just a moment ago ; left me, as usual, with fine promises, and seeking to take me to London ; but I know precisely what that means. I should never see Hampshire, Ringwood Hall, or my poor old father again.’

‘You rave, girl ! Mr. Vere of the Eighth or King’s sailed from Southampton weeks ago.’

‘Oh, no, he didn’t, miss,’ replied the girl, with a strange but bitter smile of half triumph ; ‘for I was there, and saw the soldiers depart.’

‘And he is here, you say—*here* ?’

‘Yes ; and see—see, there he goes, this moment, on that beautiful white horse : and doesn’t he look handsome, miss ?’

Two staff officers in undress uniform, who were evidently taking part in the military movements then in progress among the green lanes, dashed at full speed along the highway, and one of them was Jocelyn Derinzy on his well-known white charger.

‘And *he* is the person who has called himself Mr. Vere to you !’ asked Gertrude, after a pause, when both horsemen had vanished.

‘As God hears me, miss, he is !’ replied the girl, in growing alarm, fear, and bewilderment, a sentiment in which Gertrude

certainly shared, while her manner greatly impressed Phœbe Bagshaw, whose haggard and tearful eyes were fixed with a hungry and inquiring expression upon her beautiful face ; for now both women had made a discovery which filled the heart of one with rage and bitterness, and the heart of the other—Gertrude—with joy and triumph.

‘Heaven be thanked for what this chance meeting has revealed, and heaven give me patience to consider it !’ thought she, and turned again to the unfortunate Phœbe Bagshaw, who, in one sense, had been doubly deceived.

Gertrude’s indignation at the part so daringly played by Derinzy, in so wantonly assuming the name of another, and maintaining this low intrigue while affecting to love herself, was almost forgotten in her supreme satisfaction on discovering the innocence of Herbert Vere. But what could that discovery avail her now ?

‘How have I been deceived !’ she said almost aloud, as she hastened homeward ; ‘I have crushed and insulted a noble heart that loved me only too well and hopelessly, and now I am powerless to tell him so !’

Breathless with haste, she returned to Ringwood Hall, and seeking Lady Templeton in her dressing-closet, lost no time in acquainting her with the discovery she had made, and who the real person for whom the letter was intended proved to be ; and her mother heard her with more of cold disdain than either surprise or indignation.

‘Oh, mamma,’ added Gertrude, ‘are you not glad ?’

‘Are you ?’

‘Of course, mamma.’

‘Well, so far as that Mr. Vere is concerned, and the use made of his name—culpably, I admit—by Colonel Derinzy, I am neither glad nor sorry, but totally indifferent on the subject. Really, my dear Gertrude, it all matters nothing to me now.’

‘Well, mamma, but if Derinzy can be so base ?’

‘Only sowing the last of his wild oats, my dear—sowing the last of them ; he will be guilty of no more *faux pas* when

he is Viscount Derinzy, and has Gertrude to guide him with a silken rein. But let us go downstairs : the breakfast bell has rung,' she added, and totally dismissed the subject, so far as her daughter was concerned.

She did not, however, throw over the colonel, who, on receiving a little explanatory private note from her, contrived to absent himself from Ringwood Hall for a time.

Acting under her mother's iron influence, Gertrude had been weak up to a certain point, and schooling herself, as we have said, acted as she did in that farewell meeting at the stile ; but there her weakness ceased. She had resolved that she would not marry Viscount Derinzy's heir, even before this degrading *dénouement* ; a serious and feverish illness saved her from farther annoyance for a time, and ere she recovered he was consoling himself at a spa in Germany.

And Vere was gone now with a belief in her selfishness, her ambition, avarice, and all but perfidy ; for though she had given him no promise and had broken no plighted troth, still he knew that she loved him, or had done so ; and now he would suppose that, with that love in her heart, she had accepted the shallow Derinzy !

With how much contrition now she recalled the serene cold stare of indifference, it might be scorn, with which she had met for a moment the poor fellow's earnest and wistful gaze when he was departing at the head of his company, it might be to die in action, to perish amid other perils of a soldier's life, and to return no more !

'Women, they say, act first and think afterwards, and truly I have been one of these !' she exclaimed to Rosamund.

Now, again and again, her thoughts wandered back to him, whom really she loved well and dearly ; and she recalled fondly many a delightful though brief time spent with him, and many a remark deemed trivial then, but so full of tender meaning now, and tender interest too.

In the first burst of her contrition for having wronged him and so cruelly 'cutting him dead,' as Kyrle Desborough phrased it, she felt that she could do anything and risk any-

thing to see him once again, to hear his voice once more. She felt now that at all hazards she could devote her life to him, and seek by her love and affection to bring back sunshine to his soul ; and much more to the same purpose, of which she had read in novels, occurred to her, with the ever-recurring conviction that the conventional fetters of society bound her to certain rules and observances, that the waters of the North and South Atlantic separated them, and that it was all too late for regrets now ; and perhaps the first tidings she should have of him might be his marriage with another, for he had left her with a sore and embittered heart, and red coats, she had heard, were always at a premium in the colonies.

Lady Templeton had some of the latter thoughts combined with hopes too. She had carried her point triumphantly with the miserable Rosamund, and, knowing herself, felt assured that, even without the aid of Maud, she should yet do so with Gertrude.

Chance and the fortunes of the service had suddenly achieved one good point for her. Vere was happily despatched to the West Indies, where some fighting was going on, she scarcely knew with whom, and cared less ; the yellow fever proved fatal sometimes, and—ah well, none knew what might happen ; and certainly she cared little what *did* happen, provided Herbert Vere came within her orbit no more.

Separated from her, apparently for ever, Vere had his own sorrowful convictions to endure. Gertrude might relent ; but whatever she did or thought, he could move in the matter no more now ; and circumstanced as she was—hedged in by the natural dictates of maidenly modesty and the barriers of society—neither could she ; so, in tears and bitterness of heart, she committed the event to Fate, and meanwhile he was sailing towards the tropics.

CHAPTER XIV.

H.M.S. 'BANNOCKBURN.'

WE have said that, ere noon on the day of departure, every rope on board H.M. troopship *Bannockburn* had been coiled away in its place, and every one seemed to have settled down into his proper place ; and much more so did the latter seem the case when they had seen the last of old England, the lighthouses on the bold and lofty Lizard Point, fade out amid the tumbling waves of a sombre evening sea, while the twilight darkened into night ; and already, by the very isolation from the rest of the world, many of the passengers seemed to have become quite old friends, for as all belonged to, or were connected with the service, they had a thousand topics and sympathies in common, and a mutual knowledge of many places and persons, thus affording a source of conversation even to the most taciturn.

In an ordinary ocean-going steamer such qualities for easy companionship would not develop themselves till the third or fourth day of the voyage ; but in a crowded transport it is altogether different, and everybody rapidly becomes acquainted with everybody else, through the freemasonry of the service, and the general habit of knocking about the world.

In the former instance, the passengers are often shy, and seem to view each other with ill-concealed distrust, and look generally forward with gloom and doubt to the twenty days' run to the West Indies—it used to be two months under sail. After a time, however, the men get their 'sea-legs,' the women begin to look less plain, and the pretty to seem perhaps beautiful ; alliances spring up and coteries are formed ; friendships, though they cannot be very lasting, are cemented amid the discomforts incident to a sea-voyage, and the necessary attentions these contingencies elicit.

But in a transport most of the men, and many of the women too, have been at sea before ; and among the former several

are sure to have met in past times, somewhere up 'country' or in remote stations—it is all one when from Portsmouth to Patna, Dublin to Delhi ; and then that delightful evening reunion, the mess, 'the perfection of dinner society,' as it has been justly named, cements all.

As the senior officer on board, Kyrle Desborough had a cabin to himself, and it was, in rough weather, the chief resort of the few officers of the Eighth on board ; for Kyrle was a hospitable fellow, and his decanters and cigar-box were never off the table.

Some years' career of service by land and sea had long since cured Kyrle of any bashfulness, if he ever had any ; and he was wont to boast that he could make any man, 'by a slap on the back, his comrade in a brace of shakes ;' and, as others averred, any woman his sister, or something more tender, whatever it might be, in the same time.

The ladies were certainly not now Kyrle Desborough's weakness, whatever they, or one in particular, might have been to him in times past ; yet it was difficult for him to abstain from making himself, by mere force of habit, agreeable to everything he came across in the shape of a petticoat ; and their glances, hand-pressure, and all that sort of thing, he returned with interest, all the more that he was heart-whole, and likely to remain so.

In that isolated little floating circle—for little it was by comparison, though the *Bannockburn* was a large troopship of 500-horse power—Desborough was the lion ; he was so handsome, so full of genuine good-humour and *bonhomie*. Careless of attraction, yet, as usual, he attracted the women—the newly wedded and 'the old soldiers,' accustomed to barrack and bungalow life, alike—to an extent that poor little Rosamund would have repined to see. He evoked no tribute, because he cared nothing about it. No man was more destitute of personal vanity, yet they strove to feed it by a species of inferred adulation and compliment which should have come from him, and which he laughed at, but might have missed, had it been withdrawn. Yet a time was to come

when Kyrle Desborough was to find himself in the most serious love scrape a man could be involved in.

Some of the ladies on board were newly-married, and were new also to military life ; yet it seemed very charming from this point of view, and to have hourly so many handsome young fellows in attendance upon them, though they were, of course, very much absorbed in their husbands ; but there were some 'oldsters' who had been in half the garrison towns of India, and thus, as Desborough had it, there was no one in the ship whom Vere 'could legitimately spoon on,' and, as if by counter irritation, cure his 'complaint,' in the three weeks the voyage out was likely to last.

'I'll bet a cool fifty you will get over your fancy for that girl just as you got over the measles and hooping cough,' said Kyrle, as they were having a breezy smoke on the bridge one evening. 'By Jove, I thought you had knocked about enough, and seen enough of life, and all that sort of thing, not to let your heart run away with your head ; for you moon after this bit of muslin or tarlatan, or whatever it is, like a schoolboy of seventeen !'

If Vere had duly booked Kyrle Desborough's bet, he would have won it in some sense, but in some sense only, as our narrative will show.

'Yes, yes, old fellow,' continued Desborough, 'after we have had a shy at the niggers, you will substitute the laurel for the willow in your cap, and become, like me, a reasonable being. And, now that the last of the ladies have left the poop, we will have a quiet smoke there,' he added, filling his brier-root pipe from a pouch, the pretty beading of which was the work of Rosamund Templeton, though then, perhaps, he never thought about it.

Already new constellations were rising, and it became a species of luxury to lounge on the poop when the night was fine, and watch the shifting lights and shadows that gleamed about the great ship, from the binnacle lamps, the engine-house, and occasionally from the cabin along the main-deck, where the watch in their great coats trod to and fro or loitered

in groups, and to trace the outline of great sails bellying out against the starry sky, or the long wake of pale green fire that the revolutions of the screw left far astern amid the dark waves of the tumbling sea.

The idea of limitless space, the singular silence that is not all silence, for there are the occasional sounds in the ship, the hum of the wind through the rigging aloft, the rush of the bow through the water, and its wash under the counter to mingle with the foam of the revolving screw, are conducive to reflection and thought ; and thus Vere and Desborough spent many an hour on the moonlit or starlit deck, and seldom exchanged a word, in the quiet companionship of having a pipe together ; while the daily repetition of sea and sky did not prove very conducive to banish the image which haunted the imagination of the former, as he frankly admitted to Desborough.

‘ It is not in hearts that sink soonest—female hearts especially,’ said Kyrle—‘ that sorrow and love have their most powerful or lasting effects. With many, a shower of tears cures—or at least for the time soothes—everything. It is from the remembrance of joys we have lost, says some one, that the arrows of affliction are chiefly pointed,’ he added, for, when not in a cynical or chaffing mood, Desborough could be sensible enough. ‘ I can’t comprehend how you can let this girl’s image haunt you as it does. She broke no promise made to you ; she simply allowed you to love her with all your heart, or lured you into doing so ; and then, because it was mamma’s wish, threw you over heartlessly for a fellow with a handle to his name.’

‘ Not quite heartlessly,’ urged Vere, as the memory of that meeting by the stile came back in all its force ; ‘ but I go now to Jamaica in the full hope that change of scene, absence, and the excitement of a little fighting, if it goes on, will enable me to forget her.’

‘ As we have all forgotten others.’

‘ Nay, speak for yourself, Kyrle.’

‘ I am sure that the elements you refer to *do* effect a

species of cure by forcing a man's attention to the present, and thus compelling him to substitute it for the past.'

'And to forget her?'

'Perhaps not.'

'What then?'

'To think with patience, as distance and novelty come to one's aid. But *apropos* of this subject, Vere, your young English lady is, after all, an enigma—like the sex everywhere else,' he continued, lapsing into his general tone. 'She is, we shall say, a highly-finished article—thoroughbred and all that sort of thing—perfect, pure, innocent, and sweet as a mountain rose, though reared in Mayfair or Tyburnia; she may be plucky as Lady Fanshawe, or Lucy Hutchinson, or Joan of Arc herself; or as that brave Douglas girl, so "tender and true," who put her snowy arm in the place from where the murderers of James I. had stolen the bar away; and she may act as—as Gertrude Templeton has acted to you, by making you play the fool. Besides, for all you know, you may have had an escape.'

'How?'

'Half the men in this world are married to the wrong woman.'

'Kyrle, such a misanthrope you are!'

'Not at all, but a philosopher,' replied the other, carefully cleaning out his brier-root and depositing it in a velvet case. 'Look at a P. and O. liner rounding the Sand Heads, or working out of Bombay Harbour for Aden. The poor devil of a husband, who can't get leave as yet, has barely waved a last affectionate farewell to the wife of his bosom, before Jones of the Rifles, Smith of the Lancers, or Robinson of the Artillery, is shawling her shoulders, placing a cushion at her back, or a hassock under her pretty feet, and beginning a most brotherly intercourse that doesn't always end with the voyage.'

'You'll be hit hard some day, Kyrle,' said Vere, laughing.

'Not a bit of it, though I have been in my time; and now let us go back to the mess-table for a glass of dry sherry.'

Who on earth is that singing?' he added, as a cheery and hearty voice, though somewhat indistinct, issued from the mess-cabin.

'Toby Finch.'

'Of course. The song he knows so well and sings so badly always come off about this time—his old Meltonian ditty.'

And Toby's voice was heard trolling a song in this style :

'On, on ! for the bitches are racing before us—

Not a nose to the earth, not a stern in the air ;

And we know, by the notes of that modified chorus,

How straight we must ride if we wish to be there !'

They had now passed the Azores, having run near Fayal and seen Villa Orta, situated at the bottom of a beautiful semicircular bay, overlooked by an amphitheatre of mountains, clothed to their summits with myrtles, laurels, and many flowering shrubs.

Quickly now they began to draw near the tropics, the regions of daily sunshine, and Vere felt his spirits rise and his pulses quicken in spite of himself ; for even regret, sorrow, and disappointment are brighter in sunshine than shadow, so true it is that there is 'an analogy between the sunlight of the cloudless skies and the sunshine that gleams into the darkened chambers of the human soul.'

How long, long ago it all seemed now since that sweet epoch in Vere's life ; those chance meetings in London, when love was developing itself between them, and the secret understanding was coming about ; and those in Hants, at Aldershot and Ringwood Hall ! There seemed a strange unnatural remoteness now between the present and that period, of which Vere had forgotten all idea of what occurred beyond it—the time he had known and learned to love Gertrude Templeton.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REGIMENT OF ANNE OF DENMARK.

THE routine of duties entailed by the transport regulations for troops on board ship served to kill time. The periods for exercise, when the men were beat to quarters, or moved by squads of twenty double-quick round the deck, were a species of novelty to the ladies on the poop, and all other kind of rounds and inspection, as if in barracks, till the bugles blew tattoo; when the subaltern of the day went between decks, with a sergeant carrying a lantern, to see that every man was in his hammock and all lights extinguished, save those in the officers' cabins. Then, as the ship got into warmer latitudes, the wind-sails were rigged to throw streams of cold air between decks—a means to health which soldiers frequently and oddly try to defeat, by tying up the bottom of them, unless prevented by the sergeant of the watch; but in fine evenings the band, on the poop, was a never-failing source of pleasure, frequently eliciting a hearty cheer from a passing ship, as her head-sails were thrown in the wind and her crew lined her side to hear, perhaps, familiar strains wafted over the waves; and then dipped their ensign three times from the gaff-peak in farewell to the Queen's redcoats, as the great transport sped unerringly on her watery way towards the Greater Antilles.

Kyle Desborough, who was animated by a very high degree of that glorious spirit, *esprit de corps*, for the 'Eighth or King's,' in which he was the third of his family who had borne a commission, was never tired of conversing with Vere, or any other who would listen to him, on the past achievements of the regiment, the history of which he loved to trace (and would often do so, over a social glass in his cabin, or with a quiet weed on the lee-side of the poop, when all were turned in save a few lingerers, like Finch or Clive) from the days when it was first raised in 1685, on the rebellion of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, by Robert

Lord Ferrars of Chartly, as the Regiment of Anne of Denmark, afterwards the Good Queen Anne of glorious memory. And in these our days, when a cold-blooded and utilitarian government threatens to sweep away and obliterate all distinctions of corps and numbers, with their gallant badges and historic mottoes—the heraldry of the service—won in countless fields of battle—such traditions as those which Kyrle fostered must ever be of interest.

Though named after the Princess of Denmark, the Eighth was raised in Hertfordshire; and at its first muster the captains, cuirassed and plumed, carried pikes, the lieutenants partisans, the ensigns half pikes, and the sergeants ponderous halberds; and in every company there were thirty pikes and seventy-three matchlock men. And such was the motley equipment of ‘Ours’ when, three years after, the great Duke of Berwick was colonel, and the corps deserted, like the other British troops, *en masse*, to join the invading Dutch under William of Orange, for whom, in the foolish spirit of those days, they fought in Holland—as the succeeding century saw them do, at Kaiserworth, Venloo, Blenheim, Ramillies, and Oudenarde, in the defence of that wretched Electorate of Hanover for which so much British blood and treasure were wasted from generation to generation.

At Dunblane the corps was swept off the field by the Highland swordsmen, but won that quadruped so costly to the British Isles—the *white horse*—for its cognisance, though its colonel, Archibald Douglas, Earl of Forfar, fell at its head covered with wounds. At Culloden the Eighth was in the second line, under the brutal Brigadier Huske. It served in the wars of Egypt and America, capturing two colours at Ogdenburg in 1813; yet it is one of the few regiments that did not serve under the glorious old Iron Duke in the Peninsula, though it had fighting and hard knocks enough elsewhere.

It was in ‘Ours’—the Eighth or King’s—as Desborough had often heard his father relate, that, after Culloden occurred, the now-forgotten episode of two deserters, whose

story made so much noise, taking a cast of the dice for life when *both* were sentenced to die—a custom as old as the days of Oliver Cromwell, as we learn from an old periodical, the *London Scout*, printed in 1654. A reference is made to the story in the papers of Mr. Mason, who was secretary to the ‘Butcher Duke,’ as he is still called; but he omits the names, localities, and many other details, which were well known to Kyrle Desborough.

At the time when General Edward Wolfe (father of the hero of Quebec) was colonel of the Eighth, there enlisted in the corps two young Lancashire lads, natives of a secluded village among the range of hills called ‘the Backbone of England,’ which runs northward from Ashton-under-Lyne to Hornby.

In education and birth, these young men, named respectively Willie Ashton and Tom Cleveley, were much above the usual kind of persons who then enlisted as soldiers; and though fast friends and old schoolfellows, they took ‘the King’s shilling’ from very different motives. They marched together, save when on duty, were never separated, and shared the same tent in the camp at Inverness, when the dreadful ravage of the adjacent country was in progress.

Willie Ashton became a soldier because his parents interfered to prevent his marriage with a sweet and pretty, but humble, girl of the village—a Lancashire witch, with dark eyes and many winning ways. But Tom Cleveley, who was a lad of spirit, with an unsettled and roving disposition, attracted by the splendour of a party recruiting by beat of drum, with swords drawn, and cockades streaming, as was then the fashion, and for long after the accession of Queen Victoria, and believing the life of a soldier to be all that the recruiting officer and his sergeant—a veritable Sergeant Kite—depicted it to be, took the coin of Fate, after hearing a harangue, which we give verbatim, from the orders issued for such an occasion, and which the sergeant addressed to the crowd :

‘To all bold and aspiring heroes, who have spirits above

slavery and trade, and incline to become gentlemen by bearing arms in his Majesty's Eighth or King's, commanded by the magnanimous General Edward Wolfe, let them repair to the drumhead' (*Tow-row-row-row went the drum*), 'when each gentleman volunteer will be honourably entertained, receive instant pay, and good quarters, with a guinea in advance, and a crown to drink the health of his Majesty King George. God save their Majesties and the House of Hanover !'

Then the 'point of war' was beaten, the grog went freely round, and, despite the tears of his mother, a widow, the cockade was soon streaming from the hat of Tom Cleaveley, who departed to join the regiment, with her blessings and her unavailing tears. While Lois Winsford from a window—for no nearer approach was permitted—now watched the departure of her lover, as the recruiting party, with drums beating, steel glittering, and ribbons flaunting, accompanied by a noisy herd of smock-frocked rustics, disappeared on the road that led to Manchester.

The two friends had not been long in that wretched winter camp at Inverness, exposed to the cold and bitter blasts from the Murray Firth, ere they had sorrowful proof that there was a vast difference between the ideal 'gentleman volunteer' of the sergeant's harangue and a real private soldier of George II., with his sixpence per diem wherewith to supply alike the necessities and luxuries of life—the latter being in this instance reduced to blackball and pipeclay.

But most miserable of the two was the lover, Willie Ashton, who, in addition to selling himself into that which now appeared hopeless and life-long peril and slavery, was separated, apparently for ever, from the girl he loved—from Lois Winsford, whom he knew to love him well and tenderly.

They were both sick of their existence, and sick too of the daily task of rapine and outrage entailed by the Duke's orders on the Jacobite districts, and the butchery often of unharmed Highlanders, whom they had to shoot down like dogs, even after they had, in the old Roman fashion, muffled their heads in their plaids, in token of surrender ; and, in short, after

much communing together, they took the fatal resolution of deserting—a difficult task to achieve in those pre-railway times, at least with final success.

They fled homewards, travelling by night, and concealing themselves by day in thickets, fields, or morasses. They left Scotland behind them, crossed the Tweed at Carlisle, and, after enduring an infinity of hardships, came at last in sight of their native hills that divide Lancashire from Yorkshire, and worn, weary, despairing and desperate—rather than overjoyed, the one with the hope of embracing his mother, the other by the desire of embracing the girl he loved—when, incapable of further exertion, they flung themselves on the floor of a barn, just as evening was closing, and the sun of the pleasant summer time lit up the distant walls, the windows, and the ivy-covered church-spire of the village in which they were born, and in which all their desires were centred.

The hay harvest was just over ; the work-people were having a jovial supper in a field close by ; but though perishing with hunger and fatigue, now that they had reached that village home for which their repentant souls had thirsted and panted, they dared not, for the fear of recognition, approach these happy rustics to beg a slice of bread or a draught of ale, which doubtless would both have been freely accorded. So there they lurked in the barn, an old building which they both knew well ; it had seen generations of rustics come and go, and the grain of many a year garnered and winnowed under its crazy roof, now brown and covered with mosses of many tints.

And all around them spoke of home ; the full-growing corn-fields, with scarcely a footway left between the rich grain and the leafy hedgerows, where the great green dock-leaves, the bindweed, and the long feathery grass grew together, with corn-flowers and poppies ; and as the sunset died away over the hills, the familiar chimes—familiar as the voices of old friends—came floating softly towards the sinking lurkers on the evening air.

But they had been traced from Carlisle ; and ere they

could make those they loved so well aware of their vicinity, the unhappy creatures were overtaken by a cavalry patrol, and afterwards tried by a court-martial and condemned to death.

Both were equally guilty ; but Edward Wolfe was a gentle and humane officer, and ordered—according to a custom then prevalent in the service—that the two prisoners were to cast lots by dice, and that one only should suffer the terrible penalty.

At the appointed time the regiment was formed in three sides of a hollow square. On the fourth side, which was open, a grave had been dug, and beside it was placed a plain black coffin, to hold the remains of the loser. In the centre of the square stood the bass drum, with a box and dice upon its head, and near it stood the chaplain, Bible in hand, and clad in his surplice.

The morning was cold and chill ; damp and wetting mist was rolling lazily up from the valleys ; the sun was enveloped in cloud ; all Nature seemed cold and cheerless ; and in the ranks of the Eighth the soldiers, who had never quailed at Fontenoy or Dettingen, or when the Highland swordsmen came swooping down upon them at Culloden, had faces that were blanched and pale, for the whole scene and all its concomitants proved grim and repulsive.

Prior to the prisoners Ashton and Cleveley being brought forth, they had both passed a night of dark and brooding horror. Their friendship for each other, we are told, was real and tender, though not of the classic and romantic or Damon and Pythias kind as to lead each to desire that he should die for the other. Both were practically most desirous to live ; but the soul of each was naturally harrowed by the terrible thought that he could only do so by the death of his friend ; and both were pale as ashes, ghastly, and wan, when under escort they came to the fatal drumhead, when each, in a voice all unlike his own, requested the other to begin.

At the tiny ivory instruments of death Willie looked nervously, as he thought of his black-eyed Lois and all that de-

pended on the first, and to him only cast of the dice. He shuddered, covered his face with his hands, and drew back, while Edward Wolfe, a veteran of the wars of Marlborough and Eugene, and latterly of Wentworth's terrible expedition to the Antilles, stood near in his brigadier wig and Kevenhuller hat, looking grimly, yet pityingly on.

He then ordered Tom Cleveley to advance and throw. The prisoner took up the box, in which the dice were heard to rattle, so tremulous was his hand ; and with an invocation to heaven for strength to guide him, he was about to throw, when the shrieks of women were heard ; and from the open side of the hollow square, where the yawning grave and coffin lay, there rushed forward, with hair dishevelled, garments worn, torn, and stained, and faces distorted by fear—well nigh frenzy—the girl Lois Winsford and the widowed mother of Tom Cleveley.

It was indeed Lois Winsford, but not the Lois that Willie Ashton had last seen, with a laughing mouth, a merry *piquante* face. The eyes were dark as ever, but dimmed with tears, and the perfect but small features were convulsed by grief.

The tender eyes and appealing face, that had ever haunted and followed him since the time he had left the village, were before him again, and nestling on his neck. But now it filled him with vague terror ; for what use or purpose had she come but to behold the death of one—it might be both !

Lois was wont to have the most fascinating little ways, the most silvery little laugh and sweet little voice that ever existed ; but all were gone now, and misery alone remained ; for after a momentary transport of joy and hope at finding the two comrades alive, she and the mother of Cleveley were soon aware of the dreadful uncertainty of what was to follow now.

Heedless of the many eyes around them, Lois Winsford clung to the neck of her lover.

'Willie—Oh, Willie!' she murmured, in a breathless voice.

'My little Lois, my sweet little Lois!' he said, in broken

accents, while caressing her and smoothing her dishevelled hair.

‘Mother ! mother !’ cried Tom Cleveley.

‘My son—O, my son !’ was all the poor woman could utter again and again ; while the staff officers stood restlessly and uneasily beside the fatal drum, watching from time to time the face of Edward Wolfe, who again commanded Cleveley to throw the dice.

‘Throw for me, sir,’ said the latter, and hid his face in his mother’s breast (as he had been wont to do in boyhood), till she fell on her knees, pouring forth prayers to heaven.

Wolfe signed to the adjutant, who took up the box for Cleveley, and threw *nine* ; and then—such is the selfishness of human love—a gleam of hope and imperfect joy spread over the haggard visage of the widow ; while the lovers, believing that now all was over with them, clung to each other desperately and fatuously, till they were forcibly torn asunder, and Willie Ashton was imperatively commanded to throw.

Impelled by the force of that discipline which becomes a second nature to the soldier, he advanced sternly and rigidly to the drumhead, rattled the dice-box, and threw ; but stepped back, for the sound emitted by the instrument seemed as his own death-knell.

‘*Ten !*’ said the adjutant.

‘*Ten !*’ cried Lois, and rushed again into the arms of Willie ; and while both fainted, the provost-marshal advanced to take possession of Cleveley, to whom his frantic mother clung with all her strength, clasping him round the knees as she lay upon the earth.

Then it was that Edward Wolfe—the father of the gallant and gentle Wolfe who fell on the Heights of Abraham—could no longer hold out—for, sooth to say, many officers and soldiers were now sobbing in the ranks, and all were deeply moved—and, raising the old woman with his own hands, he said :

‘Your son is pardoned. *You*, Ashton, however, shall be

a prisoner still, but in the custody of this pretty damsel, to whom the chaplain shall bind you for life.'

And so this episode, which might have ended so tragically and for the final consummation of which, in a very different way, the chaplain stood by, Bible in hand—ended joyously for the four most deeply concerned in it, and to the supreme satisfaction of the Eighth or King's, who simultaneously burst into three hearty cheers. And Edward Wolfe was wont to say, he felt more genuine pleasure and true glory from this act of clemency than when he hoisted the British colours on the Castillo Grande.

The voyage towards the Antilles was a pleasant and prosperous one, though, after the tropic of Cancer was passed, those who inhabited the lower deck complained bitterly of the port-holes being closed, however high the sea might run—complaints heard by the hard-hearted quartermaster and boatswain with sublime indifference and equanimity.

On a glorious day of tropical sunshine, the transport passed among the Caycos, a cluster of islands at the tail of the Bahama bank, and not far from San Domingo, places so sterile by perpetual want of rain, that even canes fail to grow there. Rough weather followed, when the topsails were close-reefed and lowered on the caps, and the *Bannockburn* shipped so many heavy head seas, that the Robert Bruce, which formed her figure-head, had both its crown and battle-axe torn away; but fine weather followed, and on a lovely evening, which Herbert Vere never forgot, the transport, under half-steam, was slowly gliding between Cuba and San Domingo, but nearer to Cape St. Nicholas, a headland of the latter. The scene was one of those that can be found in the tropics only, and when the sun, as it was then, was about setting.

Through streaks of amber vapour, that finally blended in a blaze of glory, illuminating sea and shore, the sinking sun seemed to linger at the horizon till the whole waves around the ship were changed to molten gold, while in some places

the coast of San Domingo was sunk in deep and purple shadow, in others tipped with crimson fire.

'Jamaica is right ahead now,' said the captain ; but we have a run of three hundred miles yet, ere we shall see the Blue Mountains rising from the water, and round Morant Point—this cape which you see depicted here in a photo,' he added, showing Vere an album of views and *cartes de visite*, with H.M. *Bannockburn* under sail, steam, at anchor, and in every imaginable way, all placed together pell-mell ; and as people usually do with such volumes, Vere began, with half-listless curiosity, to turn over the pages, till one arrested and fixed his attention.

Vere, we have said, never forgot that evening ; yet it arose from the very simple circumstance of a photo in the captain's album ; but it was the photo of a singularly lovely girl, whose face riveted his attention and compelled his interest in some indefinable manner ; for after going through the volume, he turned to look on that sweet yet haughty face again and again.

A living and speaking face—if we may use such terms of an inanimate picture—giving the conviction that it must be a good likeness ; and to Vere it had—for the life of him he could not have said why—a pleasing and indefinable charm. Where had he seen that photo before—or the original ? Who was it like that he had ever seen ? No one ; Gertrude perhaps ; but he dismissed that idea too. This girl was a dark beauty, with strongly defined eyebrows indicative of character, and with features as proud and soft and aristocratic as those of Gertrude ; but more of waggery, it might be witchery, in her bright eyes, and more of humour in her soft and mobile lips, for that they were very soft and mobile Vere felt assured.

'She is stupid-looking, and her eyes are dreamy.'

'They are not,' replied Vere to Desborough, who had been critically looking over his shoulder.

'I don't think that girl could flirt judiciously, were it to save her life.'

'She is too natural to be a coquette ; but she can flirt in

her way, and to perfection,' said the captain of the transport, a jolly silver-haired old fellow.

'Not much of a recommendation,' said Kyrle. 'Has she ever done so with you?'

'With me! Why, man alive, I am her godfather, and old enough to be her real father!' replied the sailor, laughing.

'And who is she?' asked Vere, looking up.

'Virginia Bellingham, daughter of old Bellingham, the planter near Morant Bay. She is the belle of Jamaica, and one of the richest heiresses there.'

'An heiress!' said Toby Finch, striking in; 'then I suppose she has no sisters.'

'Sisters—no; and if she had, Nature could not have made another like her. She is an only child.'

'A little dash of the tar-brush, I think; just the slightest *souffçon*,' said Desborough detractingly.

'Not at all,' replied the captain testily; 'she is a pure Creole, without one drop of dark or even Spanish blood in her—a West Indian girl of genuine and good old European parentage. It is odd what ignorant notions English folks have of what a Creole is.'

'Look again at the photo, old fellow,' said Kyrle, a little while after; 'it is time that you began to live on something else than Gertrude Templeton and tobacco, and to think it treason to the absent if your pulses quicken when the drums beat for mess and the sea-breeze gives you a relish for the viands. You are in the way of being cured, I think; and, by Jove, Virginia—what's her name?—Bellingham is a pretty girl; shouldn't object to her as a god-daughter even.'

'Could you not think of her as a wife now, Kyrle?'

'I should as soon think of sending in my papers and quitting the Eighth or King's,' said he, with one of his quiet mocking laughs.

And more would the handsome cynic have laughed had he known that Vere *did* come again and again to look at the photo in the captain's album, as it had a pleasant fascination for him, and to this, remembering the way he had been

treated in Hampshire, he felt not indisposed to yield. Had he been detected by Kyrle, he would have been prepared to declare that he saw in it a likeness to Gertrude, though he had himself become assured that such was not in the slightest degree the case. To admire a beautiful face, animate or inanimate, could be no treason to that young lady who had so utterly cast him off.

‘Treason!’ thought he bitterly; ‘what faith or fealty do I owe her?’

It was not like Gertrude—not a bit; yet in the sophistry of fancy, or superstition of the heart, he tried hard to think that it was, and would boldly have asserted to Kyrle Desborough that he thought so. Of Gertrude Templeton he did not possess a single relic to bring her image before him; nor was such necessary, as it still seemed to be, as it were, photographed on his very brain.

‘*Eureka!*’ Tumble up, Vere; Jamaica is in sight!’ cried Toby Finch at the poop-door about dawn one morning, when he was lieutenant of the watch on deck. ‘Look alive if you wish to see

“ ‘The *Blue* Mountains glow in the sun’s golden light.”’

The welcome announcement of ‘Land ahead!’ brought all on deck betimes; and fast, with every revolution of the screw, it rose from the pale azure of the morning sea in the form of three great peaks—those of the Coldridge, the mighty mass of the Blue Mountains, which run across the island of Jamaica from the south-east to the north-west; and towards them every eye was turned and every glass levelled.

As the day wore on, the transport was steered in an easterly direction; and gradually the mountain peaks began to blend into one mass as she drew near and began to round Morant Point, with its iron lighthouse and all its morasses and cane jungles; after which, as eve was closing, she hauled up for Kingston Harbour, which lies about sixty miles distant from it.

None grew weary of looking on the famous Blue Moun-

tains, which most of those on board now beheld for the first time. In some parts they are more remarkable for beauty than boldness, particularly on the north, where they have a gentle acclivity, and are interspersed with vales, amid which the field-glasses could discover the most romantic and luxuriant scenery—groves of pimento, the deep tints of which were deliciously relieved by the verdure of the turf, seen in countless openings below. Through all these woody vales there pour a profusion of fertilising streams, that end in white cascades of foam as they fall from projecting rocks into the Caribbean Sea. Farther inland rise the greater hills, all covered with wood, peak upon peak, becoming fainter in outline and tint, till they are blended with the light floating clouds.

Under the guidance of a coloured pilot of somewhat ferocious aspect, the transport glided past the long neck of land known as Palisades, with the sandy Keys to port; and thence between Port Royal Point and Fort Augustus, till, just as the moon rose in all its wonderful radiance, her anchors were let go, and she swung at her moorings in the magnificent harbour of Kingston, which is no less than twenty-five miles in circumference, and is one of the finest and most secure in the world. The myriad lights of the town were glittering amid its busy streets, and shedding long lines of tremulous radiance across the water; its white-walled edifices stood vividly out in the light of the gorgeous moon, with the Liguanea Mountains, about six miles distant, as a background.

The sentinels had now strict orders to keep all shore-boats and canoes at a distance from the side, as the natives are wont to come off with fruit and plantains, yams, pomegranates, and pine-apples, which are frequently green and bad, and also to preclude any chance of ‘sucking the monkey,’ by the purchase of cocoa-nut shells filled with coarse Jamaica rum, which is drunk from the orifice that resembles the monkey’s mouth.

After the transport had been duly visited by the brigademajor and a medical officer, and reports given as to the health

of all on board, preparations were immediately made for disembarkation ; and by the noon of the next day, Kyrle Desborough's companies, surrounded by a capering crowd of blacks and mulattoes, mulattoes and blacks, over and over again, and of very Christy Minstrel aspect in externals, all greeting the 'new buckra sojers,' marched into those noble barracks called Up Park Camp, which are situated in the beautiful Liguanea Plain, northward of the city of Kingston ; and Vere found himself surrounded by scenes and people of an entirely new description—different, at least, from any among which he had ever served before.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL SUMMER.

'ALL travel has its advantages,' says Dr. Johnson ; 'if it lead a man to a better country, he learns to improve his own ; if to a worse, to enjoy it.' After the soreness of heart he had undergone, Vere enjoyed to the full the change of scene Jamaica afforded him—its gorgeous landscapes, its mountain vistas, and the luxuriance of its foliage and flowers ; while the different occupations incident to being quartered in Up Park Camp were not without a beneficial effect upon his mind and spirits.

He did not forget his love affair with Gertrude ; but he ceased to feel bitter on the subject, and could think of it without irritation or worry.

Disturbances certainly were expected among the negroes ; but as yet all remained quiet. The duties were easy, and the planters hospitable. So time passed pleasantly away. There was the morning ride as far as Spanish Town, or Santiago de la Vega, which stands in a beautiful plain, through which the railway runs to Kingston ; or it might be a bath in the clear waves of the Caribbean Sea, provided there were no sharks about. There were expeditions, with

Kyrle, Toby Finch, and others, to fish for eel and mullet at Ferry Moss, where they could idly whip the water with the lines while drinking iced champagne and lounging under the cool and luxuriant shadow of a silk cotton tree, that spread its stately foliage far and wide above their heads.

There were plenty of dinner invitations to the houses of wealthy planters, at whose banquets the new arrivals were always treated as old friends, welcomed amid bumpers of Madeira—banquets never without turtle and punch; for turtle is the soul of the West Indian dinner-table, and no more to be taken without punch than roast beef without mustard. Then there would be an occasional review when the major-general commanding, or the governor, who is also captain-general, was seized with a fit of zeal; and even to those who, like Vere, had been in India, the troops presented a fine sight as the glittering columns went past under the splendid blaze of a tropical sun, with the deep blue sky of Jamaica overhead, flecked by fleecy clouds, and all the fair and languid Creoles of Kingston and Santiago de la Vega surveying the Europeans critically from the windows of their carriages, drawn up in lines by the saluting point. These exhibitions were generally followed by a garrison ball, or one given at the Admiral's Pen, the residence of the naval commander-in-chief, when always a good and characteristic display of Creole beauty was presented—a beauty ever 'rich in all the fascinations of tropical girlishness,' as Coleridge has it; their dark hair radiant with diamonds and pearls—girls whose heart and soul were in the dance, and whom no amount of it seemed to fatigue, even when the boom of the morning gun announced that it was five o'clock, and the carriages came for those who would willingly have danced it all over again.

'If any of us have the bump of matrimony among our organs, it will be sure to be developed under a West Indian sun,' said Desborough, as he and some of the Eighth made their way back to barracks from one of those balls as the sun was rising above the ridges of Port Royal. 'If this sort of thing goes on we can't all escape—not even you, Vere.'

‘Why me particularly, Kyrle?’ asked the other.

‘By force of habit—mere force of habit,’ replied Kyrle; and then, with a waggish air, he sang:

“The heart like a tendril accustomed to cling,
Let it grow where it will, cannot flourish alone;
But will lean to the nearest and loveliest thing
It can twine with itself and make closely its own.”

Jamaica is hot, certainly,’ added Kyrle, as he turned his handsome and flushed face to the delicious morning breeze that came from the Caribbean Sea; ‘but, by Jove, it is not so hot as the land of the death-blast!’

‘Where is that?’ asked Clive, who was a little unsteady in his gait, and around whom the barrack-square seemed to be revolving in a circle.

‘In Bundelcund, where Vere and I have been.’

‘Then it’s a hot place?’

‘Hot! I should think so! Like being on a sand-heap under a burning-glass,’ as somebody says in *David Copperfield*.’

When not in uniform, Vere and his friends seemed to have left Regent Street in reality far behind them; and even the smartest young officers were glad to wear the standard suit of white, which is light, cool, and adapted to those regions of eternal summer; and, moreover, they were compelled to endure philosophically the bites of mosquitoes and sand-flies.

But Vere and his brother-officers soon began to find that this life in Jamaica was not to be all *couleur de rose*; for on all hands nothing was now spoken of but the expected rising of the Maroons and other negroes; and ere the spring of the year was over, the whole colony resembled, as Professor Tyndall phrased it, ‘the dried grass of a prairie, ready to be set on fire from beginning to end by a spark of successful insurrection,’ and, moreover, seemed on the eve of becoming another Hayti; for there were only 13,000 whites in the island against 450,000 negroes.

The causes of the local discontent are foreign to our story ; suffice it to say that, with the terrible experience of the Indian Mutiny fresh in the minds of all, a sure knowledge of the savage nature of the West Indian negroes and mulattoes, and the reports that were now heard on all hands, were sufficiently alarming, seditious meetings for a general revolt being held in all directions under the auspices of men—dark alike by nature and colour—named Gordon, Paul Bogle, and an active young fellow of colour named Manuel Moreno, of Spanish descent, who had already been involved in many desperate outrages, brawls, and quarrels, and of whom more anon.

‘Since emancipation,’ says a writer on this subject, ‘the negro, so far as he is himself concerned, has permitted his offspring to grow up neglected in mind, neglected in body, neglected as to education and religion, neglected as to all moral principles and treatment—neglected in everything, in fact, and wilfully given up to moral and spiritual ruin and destruction. The transition from slavery to unlimited freedom was too sudden. Experience was not wanting in so momentous a matter ; and hence the great experiment, on which the whole world looked with expectant gaze, has proved a failure, involving alike in its ruin planter and peasant, European and Creole.’

The demagogues we have named, and others, called upon all men of African descent to unite themselves into societies for mutual defence. Illegal drillings were reported to be going on all over the island, under the immediate control of the most daring agitators ; negroes were being enlisted and sworn, officers over them elected—captains of fifty men each ; arms and ammunition were being procured and concealed ; and negotiations were made with an officer of the Confederate navy to land these, with other stores, at Black River. And thus originated those troubles with which the unfortunate Governor Eyre had to contend.

According to the parliamentary Bluebooks, one of the rebel leaders is said to have stated in August, 1865, that he ‘could swear that in less than five years there would not be a white

man in Jamaica ; that the black men would not hurt the white ladies, but have them as their wives, and just do with them as they did in Hayti ;' adding, that instead of destroying the whites in detail, 'the better way would be for them (the blacks) to agree throughout the island, and in one night massacre them ; that the blacks should go to each estate in parties and murder them all.'

This state of matters, which developed itself fast, caused a considerable increase of military duty, much alertness, and no small anxiety in the minds of all in command, as it was evident that a crisis was coming and shots would soon be exchanged.

In this wretched West Indian broil or civil war there would be hardships to be undergone, peril and massacre to be faced, together with cruel torture and wounds ; but no such glory could be won as in combating European troops. Do what one might, no medal, clasp, or ribbon would be given for conquest or victory over desperate and miserable negroes, however brave and reckless they might be ; and so far as interest in the heart of Gertrude was concerned, Vere regretted this contingency of colonial service.

Apart from the circumstance of being safely landed at the end of a pleasant voyage, he at first had felt a growing sense of satisfaction, and looked forward with sincere pleasure to garrison duty in Jamaica, where the grandeur, sublimity, and teeming fertility of the scenery exceeded all he had ever seen, save when serving on the lower slopes of the Himalayas.

As yet no outbreak had taken place, and Vere and his friends rode, fished, and shot as usual whenever they had permission to do so : but once, having ridden further than he was wont to do alone, he had a *rencontre* which was not without interest at such a time.

From Hunt's Bay he had one day ridden for several miles into the country alone and unattended, till he found himself under the shadow of the steep hills that look down on the Rio Pedro, and then discovered that he had lost his way—a discovery which was the more annoying that he was in plain

clothes, and consequently quite unarmed ; and of that fact he had been uncomfortably reminded, by the saucy bearing of several negroes whom he had passed upon the road.

They were all on their way to Kingston, apparently carrying on their woolly heads great baskets of fruit and vegetables to sell in the market. The monotonous singing with which they cheered each other, the laughter and the clatter of their tongues, died away, as Vere passed them, and their black eyes gleamed with malevolence and hate as they surveyed the 'buckra man,' lolled out their red tongues at him, and pursued him with strong invectives and epithets as long as he was within hearing.

Lest he might be provoked to use his whip, he had no desire to meet these fellows again, or to overtake them ; so, prior to returning, as the afternoon was one of intense heat, he gladly dismounted at a little wayside hotel, kept by a fat old negress named, as the sign-board informed all passers, Miss Sabina Snowball, who grinned fearfully as she welcomed him, and called him 'an 'andsome tight buckra,' as she ushered him into a cool apartment on the ground-floor, where the windows, partly shaded by green jalousies, opened to a shady verandah, beyond which was seen a stately but natural avenue of cabbage trees stretching away towards the Rio Pedro.

A young man of colour, who was seated at the table smoking, and drinking weak rum-and-water, on seeing Vere enter, rose politely, bowed, offered him a chair, and then his open cigar-case, from which Vere selected a fine havannah, thanked him and proffered his own, and then some of the usual commonplaces on the heat of the day and so forth passed, while Vere ordered a bottle of Moselle ; but Miss Sabina could only produce some tolerable Madeira, in which he asked his new acquaintance to join him, and the latter frankly did so.

He was rather handsome, both in face and figure, with a brown complexion that was remarkably pure and clear, with a certain amount of rose-tint in each cheek. His hair and moustache were jetty black. His eyes had long and silky

lashes that a belle might have envied ; but these failed to soften their wild devil-may-care and occasionally snake-like expression, while the lines about his mouth, when not concealed by his moustache, were hard and indicative of severity.

The darkness of his complexion was increased by his white dress, and by the shadow cast over his face by a broad straw hat. A diamond glittered on the little finger of his right hand, and he had large ruby studs in the breast of his shirt. That he was a young man of colour, athletic in person, and, as we have said, handsome, were perfectly apparent ; that he was dissipated was apparent too, and also that he was prepared for any mischief incident to the time, as he had a double-barrelled rifle lying on the table, while the outline of a revolver was distinctly visible in the inner breast-pocket of his white linen jacket.

As such weapons are not usually worn or used by British subjects in these isles, it attracted the attention of Vere, and led him to examine closely his new companion.

‘ You travel well armed,’ said he.

‘ So much discontent is about just now that one requires to be prepared,’ replied the other, smiling.

After a pause, he said :

‘ I am sure that I have the pleasure of addressing one of the Queen’s officers ?’

‘ I belong to the garrison at Up Park.’

‘ Been long in Jamaica ?’

‘ A few weeks only.’

‘ I trust you like it, for we are somewhat vain of our island ?’

‘ Oh, exceedingly, the people are as delightful as the climate ; but unpleasant scenes are likely to be cut out for us, for all that.’

‘ By whom ?’ asked the young man abruptly.

‘ Manuel Moreno and other discontented rascals.’

‘ You have just arrived ?’ said the stranger, frowning.

‘ A few weeks ago,’ I said.

‘ With your whole regiment ?’

'No, three companies only. We were despatched here, oddly enough, in a hurry—some two hundred and fifty bayonets or so.'

'No more?'

'Except some artillery—a half battery.'

'Ah, the captain-general expects a row, then?'

'Evidently, with Gordon, Bogle, Moreno, and that lot. The latter is, I hear, an outlaw already.'

'I have the misfortune to know him but too well,' remarked the man of colour bitterly, while a kind of gleam passed over his dusky eyes.

'Indeed! Is he as great a rascal as the public prints make out?'

'That time may show; at present Moreno, who is supposed to be concealed in Hispaniola, is just what circumstances have made him.'

'The Madeira stands with you; fill your glass again,' said Vere.

'Thanks, sir. But from all I know of Manuel Moreno, if he joins in any insurrection among the blacks, it will not be because he sympathises with their colour or their cause.'

'For what, then?'

'Revenge upon some of his own people, a revenge which is withheld him so long as the Queen's laws are in force. If blows are struck, that he will prove troublesome to the authorities I know well—for I have known Manuel from his infancy—and that he is not likely to stick at trifles when his hand is in.'

Manuel Moreno, he proceeded to tell Vere, was early left an orphan to the care of his uncle, a wealthy planter in the Surrey district of Jamaica, and in boyhood proved a wild and unmanageable fellow, that made him alike the bane and favourite of the household; but he was the peculiar pet of all the negroes on the estate, not only because he was the son of a coloured man of old Spanish descent and of Maroon blood (for the Maroons were the original slaves of the Spaniards), but also because he was by nature open, joyous, inspired by

reckless courage and a propensity for fun that bordered on mischief—some averred, even on crime ; and in this wild spirit he one day, after having a quarrel with the old planter, galloped off with the horse of a gentleman visitor, an animal of great value, and selling it for a good round sum at Puerto Maria, on the other side of the island, resolved to enjoy himself with the proceeds, together with the contents of a saddle-bag, which he speedily converted into cash.

Manuel had now gone too far to make any attempt to conciliate his uncle, or hope to regain his favour, nor did he attempt to do so ; and having made the acquaintance of one of those girls of that class peculiar to the West Indies, who are too proud of having some European blood in their veins to ally themselves with a mulatto, and yet whom no pure European will marry, he became besotted by her beauty, and thought of home no more—at least while his money lasted.

These girls are born of white fathers and Mustee women, and are almost European in their fairness of complexion.

They are usually brunettes, with soft pretty features, beautiful eyes, and elegant forms, with exquisite long black hair. The love of Manuel Moreno possessed all these in perfection, but she had neither their affection nor constancy ; for ere he could marry her—and the infatuated lad would have done so—his money was nearly spent, and with the little that was left she made her escape from Puerto Maria, and, leaving him to shift for himself, was seen no more—by Moreno at least.

That spark of devilry which lurks in every man's breast now blazed into a flame in the heart of Manuel Moreno, and could he have laid hands on his deceiver, in his jealous fury and resentment he would have acted some terrible tragedy ; but luckily she eluded him, and when the spell in which she had held him was broken he became sensible of the follies and crimes he had committed, with the necessity for obtaining relief lest he should starve.

He resolved now to cast himself on the clemency of this

uncle whom he had outraged, and after travelling afoot some sixty miles reached the estate amid the mountains of the Surrey district, and was welcomed with open arms by his old friends the negroes.

His uncle was absent in Kingston, where he remained for several days ; but in his place there reigned at home one of whom Manuel had often heard, but barely seen in her childhood—his uncle's only daughter, a girl of great beauty, and verging on the bloom of womanhood, who had just returned to Jamaica, after having spent some years in an educational establishment at the West End of London.

Ignorant of much that Manuel had been guilty of, this handsome cousin received him as a returned prodigal, with much kindness—even tenderness—for was not he the son of her aunt, though that relation had lost caste by marrying a man of colour? and she could not fail to see, even amid his rags and misery, that the lad was the possessor of great personal attractions, with a very winning manner. But this emotion went no further, for she was highly educated and brilliantly accomplished, while he was simply a wild and uncultured colt.

‘Personal attractions most girls possess to a sufficient degree to render them attractive to somebody,’ says a writer ; ‘for though there are standards and models of beauty, yet these do not prevail with all persons, and there is something wonderful in the difference of aspect which the same face wears to different beholders.’

But by all, and under all aspects, the rare beauty of Manuel's cousin was undeniable ; and now he—sore and soured by his recent cruel desertion, dazzled by her loveliness, soothed by her sisterly kindness and protection, and lured by the whole situation—ere a week had passed was madly in love with her, all the more so that she only laughed at the whole affair, though grieved by the angry course matters took on her father's return.

‘Manuel Moreno,’ said he sternly, ‘you are my dead sister's only son, and, more than all, you are the only one of

our race who ever brought shame, for crime, upon us ; but doubtless that comes of your Maroon blood—the curse of heaven upon it !

At this taunt, which was rather a cruel one, the young man trembled and grew deadly pale, for he was aware that pride in his pure European blood, and in his unbroken descent from a Colonel Bellingham, who came in 1655 with the first English conquerors and settlers under Admirals Penn and Venables, was the ruling passion and unceasing boast of the speaker.

‘I came hither, uncle, to ask your pardon, and to seek for food, as I was literally starving,’ urged Manuel piteously. ‘Speak for me, my sweet cousin.’

‘She shall not, nor would it avail you,’ exclaimed the other furiously, as he detected an expression in his nephew’s eyes there could be no mistaking. ‘A warrant is out against you for horse-stealing and robbery, and your Maroon instincts are no palliation for these, as you shall find when in the hands of justice—and to justice I shall certainly deliver you if I find you linger within the boundaries of my estate another day. I will give you money to leave the island. Go when you will, and whither you will ; all I insist is that you go quickly.’

The old man gave him a few pounds, but was otherwise inexorable ; he shut the door in his face, threatening him with his own personal power and authority as a Justice of the Peace ; but Manuel, unknown to him, lingered for many days on the plantation, living in secret among the negroes. He was compelled eventually, without again seeing his cousin, to take the steamer, disguised as a perfect Mulatto, for Hispaniola, where he had since, no doubt, had correspondence with Bogle, Gordon, and others who were supposed to be developing an insurrection among the men of colour, on the plea that rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.

‘The fellow will certainly be hanged,’ said Vere, as the stranger’s horse was announced ; and they both mounted to proceed in opposite directions.

'I trust not,' said the other, laughing, as he slung his double-barrelled rifle behind him.

'Why?'

'For this very sufficient reason, sir, that I *am* Manuel Moreno, and have now the pleasure of wishing you good-evening.'

And with a reckless laugh he put spurs to his horse and galloped off in the direction of the Rio Grande, leaving Vere looking after him, with considerable doubts in his mind.

If this young fellow was actually the desperado Manuel Moreno, the chief, outlaw, and conspirator, how dared he go about so openly, and whence, unless he had some secret means of support, came his horse and arms, his accurate costume and jewelry? Perhaps his pretty cousin or his negro friends supplied him in secret.

'Any way,' thought Vere, as he gathered up his reins from the hand of the negro ostler, 'if he is actually Manuel Moreno, I have allowed him to pick some information that I should have withheld. Hah! this may throw some light upon the subject,' added Vere aloud, as his eye fell upon a pocket-book which his late companion had dropped on the road. 'Here, Sambo, Quashy, or whatever your name is, hand me up that,' he cried, holding forth a half-crown to the ostler, who reluctantly and sullenly handed him the article in question; and as he rode off grinned savagely, and muttered to another negro:

'De buckras hab de guns, but we hab de negro mas-cheat and fire-stick, and all de power ob de Obeah man—yaas, yaas!'

The contents of the morocco pocket-book proved beyond a doubt that its owner *was* Manuel Moreno the outlaw.

There were notes of night meetings for secret drill in various quarters; names of negroes enrolled as volunteers, particularly in St. Thomas in the East; a copy of a proclamation about to be issued to the negroes generally, calling on them to shake off their sloth, to rise against a jesuitical priesthood who sought to deceive them, and against a govern-

ment that was taxing them to death, more especially denouncing 'an unscrupulous and oppressive foreigner, Mr. Custos Ketelhodt,' of whom Vere knew nothing, save that he was an active magistrate ; and calling upon them to remember that they were no longer slaves, but free men ; to rise in arms against Governor Eyre and his band of custodes ; and promising the women of the island to be the wives and slaves of all negroes who served the cause of Jamaica, which was yet fated to rival the free black island of Hispaniola.

Among other things in a pocket of the book he found the photo of a beautiful girl—a photo quite familiar to him, for it was a copy of the same he had seen and frequently admired in the album of the captain of the transport—that of Miss Bellingham, whom he avvered to be the belle of Jamaica.

While Vere regarded it with equal interest and pleasure, he thought with astonishment, Was this girl the beautiful cousin of Moreno's story—her father the unforgiving uncle ?

The portrait he resolved to keep, but the other contents of the book he should at once forward to the authorities ; and lest the owner thereof might discover his loss, and returning demand their restitution by force of arms, Vere, who was quite defenceless, put spurs to his horse and departed at a flying gallop along the road to Up Park Camp.

'Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God !' was a sentence that often occurred among the papers of Moreno, an aphorism evidently taken from the inscription on the old cannon near which the ashes of President John Bradshaw were placed on the summit of a high hill near Martha-Brae, a small town on the north side of the island, and which (according to Randall's 'Life of Jefferson' is supposed to be one of Dr. Franklin's spirit-stirring inspirations.

Vere had continued to look from time to time so admiringly on the photo found in the pocket-book that it was not until he was nearing the barrack-gates that he discovered something written on the back of it, and in the bold clear hand of Moreno.

It was a vow conceived in savage, ferocious, and blasphemous terms—a vow which he called upon heaven to hear and register—that in the strife to come he would win the original for his wife, and put to death without mercy all who came between them, even her father, if again he dared to stand in the way.

Vere and his comrades were in the land of eternal summer certainly; yet unpleasant work seemed likely to be cut out for them in it. But what had they come for if not to serve the Queen and do their duty as her soldiers?

CHAPTER XVII.

ON DETACHMENT.

THAT evening Vere found himself and Finch in garrison and regimental orders detailed for duty, with a detachment of fifty, to a place in the neighbourhood of Morant Bay, where a serious outbreak was confidently expected, as the Custos, Baron Ketelhodt—the same official whose name appeared among the treasonable papers of Moreno—had reported to the governor of the island.

Detachment duty is never very lively at any time, and in the present instance Vere especially disliked separation from the mess and the society of his brother-officers, and that of Kingston generally; but the dawn of the following day saw him parading his men under the eye of the adjutant, previous to departure, while Desborough and some others came forth to see him off.

‘Now, old fellow, for glory at last!’ said Kyrle, laughing, as they shook hands.

‘Danger rather, and no place in Westminster Abbey.’

‘But perhaps in that other temple of fame.’

Where?’

‘In Baker Street—the Tussaud Valhalla.’

Quitting Kingston by the eastern road, after passing Rock Fort on his right flank, he struck the highway which leads

round the base of the Long Mountain towards Morant. The morning air and the breeze from the sea were delightful, but after the sun rose up in his glory the day became one of intense heat, and his heavily-accoutred soldiers, among whom he and Finch distributed all their cigars, so far as they would go, began to fag and tread slowly.

It was a breathless day,

‘When, with the sun’s excess, earth seemed to swoon;’

and Vere could not help thinking that if attacked by the negroes, while such was the state of the thermometer, at what sore disadvantage they would be. No current of air stirred the foliage of the trees, and the fierce Caribbean sun poured down a flood of yellow light—a scorching glare, beneath which all nature seemed to shrivel and quiver.

Masses of insect life buzzed and teemed amid the leaves and greenery by the wayside, brought into existence for a few brief hours by that unnatural heat, an existence that would end with sunset; and while sighing for iced drinks or bitter beer, Toby Finch was exclaiming for the thousandth time since he had landed, ‘By Jove, it *is* warm—*another* scorching day!’ when Vere, ere they had yet passed the base of the mountain, halted his party in a grove of mango-trees.

These are always stately in form, noble in dimension, and grow almost everywhere in Jamaica. Towering and compact, with a conical head of foliage dense and dark, through which no ray of the sun can penetrate, the shadow of this grove proved grateful and pleasing to the thirsty and sun-baked Britons; all the more so that there flowed through it towards the Cane River a cool streamlet amid the water of which some wild lilies were floating.

On this march Vere observed that the negroes at work in the fields did not, as usual, come hurrying forward to see or welcome, with broad grins and merriment, ‘the buckra soldiers,’ but eyed them in sullen silence; and more than once he was certain that this march was watched, but for what purpose it was difficult to determine, as more than once,

at different parts of the road, he saw the face of a negro peering at him, between those fences which divide fields in Jamaica, and are so singularly beautiful, as they are woven up with great wild flowers that never lose their bloom.

To Vere's unaccustomed eye all negroes, with their black glossy skins and woolly heads, seemed pretty much alike ; yet he had an uncomfortable idea that the steps of his parry were dogged by one in particular. But as nothing came of it then he soon forgot all about it, though he discovered ere long that the march of his detachment, its strength, and destination, were known previously at every negro village, hamlet, and plantation he passed through.

The generally hostile aspect of the black population convinced Vere that ere long the machinations of Gordon, Moreno, and Bogle would have their effect, and he would be face to face with a sable enemy ; but he could not anticipate how much and how keenly his interest would be involved in these coming events—events that were yet to make a noise, not only over all the Antilles, but at home in the British Isles. And the negroes, usually so studiously polite, had totally ceased to say, 'Huddie, massa buckra?' or 'Gar-a'mighty bless you!' at meeting and parting, meaning, 'How do you do, white master?' and 'God Almighty bless you!' but they could loll out their red tongues and be saucy enough.

By a route mostly within sight of the sea on their left flank, past several salt-ponds, and after crossing the White and Morant Rivers, Vere's party reached the town of Morant Bay, in the district of St. Thomas in the East, after three days' marches, though it could have been done in less.

The town had the usual appearance of a West Indian one ; the houses, built chiefly of wood, were roofed with shingles, not tiles, and were painted white, with green venetian blinds, all suggestive that they would burn well if set in flames, as the negroes were threatening should be the case. The next peculiarity of West Indian houses is that they are nearly incapable of affording any species of privacy to the occupants,

as the apartments all open into each other, and are so laid out that a stranger on entering — after rattling with his knuckles or umbrella handle, as bells are uncommon—may have a panoramic view of every one, from the lady in her drawing-room to the sable cook in the kitchen ; a style of construction adopted for the free circulation of air, and incident also to those days when a watchful eye was necessary over the slaves of the household.

As Vere marched in, with bayonets fixed, and a single drummer and fifer making all the music they might, the idlers in the streets gathered from every point, and presented the usual shades of visage peculiar to these localities, from the pure pallor of the albino to the deep sable of the Mandingo ; while, on the other hand, his soldiers, by their still fresh complexions, showed that they were ‘ Johnny New-comers,’ and fresh from England.

By the whites and people of colour they were greeted with warm welcome, by the negroes in ominous silence, as they were halted in front of the Court-house. Having duly reported his arrival to the ill-fated Baron Von Ketelhodt, Vere saw his men told off to their billets, after fixing upon a place of muster and parade (most necessary in case of any sudden alarm) ; and then he and Toby Finch took up their quarters in an hotel, and settled for the evening in a large and airy room, the windows of which opened on one side to the broad waters of Morant Bay, where many a gliding sail was visible on the blue expanse ; and on the other side to fine plantations and groves of trees, terminated by the eastern peaks of the Blue Mountains, whose solemn and magnificent ranges present generally a scene of grand desolation, towering cliffs, abrupt precipices, and dark woody gorges—a very chaos of creation, as they have been left doubtless by some mighty convulsion or throes of Nature.

Toby Finch was busy looking in this direction through his double-barrelled field-glass ; *not* at the famous Blue Mountains, but some groups of handsome coloured girls, taking their evening walk under one of the lofty cabbage-tree avenues

so common in the vicinity of West Indian towns ; and as all these girls—like their fairer sisters elsewhere—are extremely fond of dress, their toilettes are often made with equal taste and extravagance.

Few of them wore bonnets, but many had a kind of turban twisted gracefully round the head ; their dresses of white silk or muslin girt with a brilliantly-coloured ribbon, and their pretty ankles having sandals tied over stockings of spotless white silk ; and, despite the more than Italian darkness of their complexions, these, with their languishing eyes, were enough to excite even the admiration of Toby Finch and his senior officer too.

The former resolved to lose no time in having himself introduced somehow to at least a couple of these fair promenaders ; and this he very soon achieved, for Toby was equal to any occasion. But Vere, who was less frivolous, and had, moreover, several detachment orders to write, remained with his cigar at the window, indulging in his own thoughts amid that drowsiness and languor which were the effect of the climate, while Toby enjoyed his flirtation amid the cabbage-trees, where the sea-breeze cooled the moonlit atmosphere, and the red fire-flies began to flit to and fro.

Whatever Toby was 'up to,' his brother-officer—save upon parade—did not see much of him for some time after this ; but sooth to say Vere found occupation in another quarter, and had his hours pretty well occupied too.

A day or so after their arrival, finding himself alone, Vere resolved to explore the scenery of the district ; and putting a carefully-loaded revolver in his pocket, in case of accidents—for the time was one of peril—he set forth for an evening ramble, and, turning his back on the town and sea, struck into a path that led towards the hills.

Though the day did not pass without an adventure, it was more a pleasing than a perilous one, and Vere went, as we have said, armed ; it was not because he had any actual fear of instant danger. A 'row' was brewing, but its time seemed remote ; and although there had been a revolt in India ter-

rible beyond all parallel, Vere could not realise the idea that the dangerous conspiracy among the Jamaica blacks was so widely spread, and that it had been gathering to a head for three years, and for the three months preceding his arrival had been conducted with a secrecy so skilful that its ramifications and strength were unknown to, though suspected by, the government.

Its real object was the establishment of a black commonwealth, and 'it means,' says a writer, 'the murder, not only of all the white males, but of all the males of mixed blood, and the negro appropriation of their women, lands, and personal property. This would have proved, had it been successful, a revolution of more sweeping cruelty than that at Hayti, which spared the people of colour. The only ground assigned for the conspiracy was over-taxation; but as the taxes of Jamaica consist chiefly of import duties—heaviest on luxuries—of which the negroes, from their position, cannot be consumers, the assignment of that cause was transparently without shadow of foundation.'

Gordon and Bogle, though men of some position, and having both Scottish names, were men of negro blood; but their tool Moreno was a man of colour, and was doubtless doomed to perish with the rest, as perhaps we may show in time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MANGO GARDEN.

OBLIVIOUS of any impending troubles, Vere wandered onward, with cigar in mouth and umbrella over his head, for the day was one of intense heat, yet, singular to say, there was not much sunshine; but he had donned a pith helmet, which he had worn many a day in the East, and thought that, with it and his West Indian suit, he 'looked somewhat like a guy.'

Though a soldier and somewhat of a man of fashion, Her-

bert Vere had an artist's eye, and was a passionate admirer of that grand mistress, Nature ; hence the beauty and grandeur of the distant mountains, with the wondrous fertility and loveliness of the foreground, were full of charms for him ; for there were groves of the stately palmetto, of the cocoa-nut tree, the graceful papaw, the mango, and the shaddock.

In some places between the hills the cane-fields appeared in all the splendour of their bloom, each cane shooting up tall, straight, and slender, till terminating in a delicate lilac-tinted flower, which waves gracefully in the breeze, when there is any ; but on this day Vere was conscious of an unnatural stillness in the sultry air.

He passed the place where once a great and lofty mountain stood, till, during one of those terrible throes of Nature we have referred to, when, in 1692, an earthquake shook the whole island, it sank into the earth, and a lake of four leagues in extent took its place. Here and there he passed some picturesque negro villages, each little house composed of wattles plastered and whitewashed, each surrounded by a garden intersected by lanes, bordered with all kind of fragrant plants and flowers, and shaded by a profusion of trees—orange, shaddock, cocoa-nut, and pepper.

He had proceeded some miles—he neither knew nor cared in what direction, till a flash of green lightning made him pause and look about him, when he found the sky darkening fast, and the heat becoming so intense, combined with moisture, that he felt as if in a Californian vapour bath.

After passing the last negro village the path had become deserted and lonely ; there was no one to direct him which way to turn, and he was irresolutely pursuing a mere track between groves of magnificent trees ; and if he had forgotten it was now the rainy season, and in one of the hurricane months too, he was speedily reminded of it.

The dire stillness around him suddenly became broken by the roar of a tempest of wind that swept through the hollow between the mountains, and nearly threw him on his face ; the whole atmosphere darkened and became misty, as if

filled with smoke, through which the sun appeared red ; the air became suffocatingly hot ; while thunder rumbled over the peaks of the now dark and sombre mountains, the rain began to descend in torrents, and Vere, wheeling about, fairly fled for shelter to a grove of breadfruit trees, the enormous leaves of which, eighteen inches in length and breadth, and all of a beautiful green, so suit their colossal dimensions.

He had barely reached this bower, when he found another fugitive from the storm, in the form of a young lady, come flying thither also, palpitating like a scared bird with plumage ruffled, to whom, while politely touching his pith helmet, he proffered—mechanically perhaps—the use of his umbrella ; we say mechanically, as it was scarcely required under the dense foliage of the trees, on which the tropical rain was now descending with a sound like the roar of a cataract, and quickly forming the narrow path Vere had so lately pursued, into a fast-running rivulet.

She declined the umbrella, saying, ‘Thank you, but this will not last, I know, and I am not far from home ; but I fear a tempest may follow, and then——’

‘What then?’

‘I shall not know what to do, unless papa sends out some one of his negroes to search for me.’

‘Why?’

‘A hurricane is no slight matter to face,’ she replied, with a little nervous laugh.

‘Permit me to be at your service. I shall not leave you until I have escorted you to a place of safety.’

‘Thanks, very much. But, after England, I am not much used to these storms ; they terrify me.’

‘Ah, you have been in England?’

‘Yes, for several years.’

‘In what part, pray?’

‘Chiefly London ; then sometimes Brighton.’

They had now ample subjects to talk about, though in the past it was impossible to forget the present, with the mighty rush of the rain, the bellowing of the wind, the croaking of

the scared parrots and other birds in the branches overhead, and the occasional red gleams of lightning that penetrated the leafy masses of foliage.

Vere could see that his companion was perfectly ladylike in tone, in bearing ; that she was graceful and handsome in figure. Her dress was a simple white muslin, through the thin material of which the perfect outline of her arms and shoulders, when not concealed by a loose jacket of white silk, became plainly visible. Her face was concealed by a thin white veil tied tightly under her hat and chin, but through it he could perceive that she had fine, dark, and animated eyes ; and this she did not remove, as she said that, though she felt it suffocating, she dreaded the lightning. On one arm she carried a pretty cane basket, in which were some medicine vials and some creature comforts she had been conveying 'to the mother of old Quashy, one of papa's negroes,' as she informed Vere, when overtaken, like himself, by the tempest.

For nearly an hour they had been talking of London, and all that it suggested of scenes and places they had enjoyed in common, till the girl began to be alarmed, for, although the tempest was not increasing, it showed no signs of abating ; and even to Vere's mind, all unaccustomed as he was to the West Indies, there occurred floating fears—induced by all he had read—of tornadoes and hurricanes there, when whole towns were unroofed and swept away, when birds were blown out to sea and the sea rolled over the land, and when the mighty force of the wind was such that, at Barbadoes in 1780, a twelve-pounder was blown, on its wheels, for the distance of one hundred and forty yards.

Now and then, amid the rush of the rain and the booming of the wind, the sound of a bell, and at times of a conch-shell, came faintly, but from a distance ; and then the young lady informed Vere that she had no doubt some of her father's negroes were searching for her, as it is by the sound of these instruments that they are summoned to their work in the fields before sunrise. But time passed on, no succour ap-

peared, and the now pendant leaves of the grove were fast ceasing to be a shelter, as the rain penetrated them.

The wind still came in stormy gusts, but the lightning had passed away. The girl removed her veil, and displayed to Vere a face of very rare beauty and purity, with a straight nose and delicate nostrils, eyes full of animation, by turns tender and arch, but dark and seducingly handsome; yet he started on beholding it, for to him her face was a perfectly familiar one.

How, when, or where had he seen it before? Her beauty was pale, yet dark, with strongly defined eyebrows, a contour as patrician as that of Gertrude, but with more of humour and more of character in her features than were possessed by that gentle and, perhaps, too facile girl.

‘Miss Bellingham!’ he exclaimed, as he suddenly recognised the face he looked on.

‘What, you know me?’ she asked, with an expression of astonishment that made her lovelier still. ‘Where have you met me?’

‘I never looked upon your face till this moment, yet every feature of it is familiar to me as my own.’

‘I shall not trouble you for any explanation, sir,’ she replied, with sudden hauteur, thinking that he was presuming on the situation; and she seemed preparing to leave their present shelter at all risks.

‘Pardon my abruptness,’ he said; ‘but I have seen a photo of you——’

‘With whom—who has it?’

‘Your godfather, the captain of the *Bannockburn*. I saw it in his album when at sea.’

‘And you have actually remembered it all this time?’ she exclaimed, in a different tone.

‘All this time!’ repeated Vere, resolving to say nothing about Moreno and that other photo, with the terrible vow penned upon the back thereof.

‘Is not this a singular coincidence?’ she asked, with one of her sweetest and brightest smiles.

‘It is at least a very delightful one to me,’ replied Vere, gazing upon her with an admiration which he felt some trouble in concealing ; for she was evidently, with all her gentleness, a proud girl, and might be prompt to take offence.

‘You reside near this, Miss Bellingham ?’ he asked, after a pause.

‘Only about a mile from here, or little more—at Mango Garden, papa’s residence ; and if you will kindly give me your arm, I may make my way there with your assistance. I could not, amid this tempest of wind, do so alone.’

She gathered her thin muslin skirts, re-tied her veil, and, taking the arm of Vere, clasped it firmly as they emerged from under the dripping leaves ; for she was entirely free from self-consciousness, and perhaps too unversed in the ways of life to make her hesitate—at such a crisis especially—in availing herself of the aid of Vere, with the idea that he was a stranger, and might be glad of any pretext for making the acquaintance of a handsome girl, especially that of a well-known heiress like Virginia Bellingham of Mango Garden, or Farm as it was often called, from her father’s vast sugar-mills.

The rain had ceased, or nearly so ; yet there was quite enough moisture in the air to thoroughly soak and drench both Vere and his fair companion, whose thin muslin dress soon clung as closely to her delicate and beautiful figure as she to his arm, which more than once he had to put fairly round her, lest she should be swept away—literally torn from him—by the fierce gusts of hot wind against which they struggled, sometimes breathlessly and almost in vain—gusts on the wings of which the affrighted birds flew hither and thither : and tempests of wet leaves, twigs, fruit and branches, were blown in every direction as they were rent from the wildly-tossing trees.

‘Do hold me fast !’ exclaimed the girl in her terror ; and Vere, whose umbrella had long since vanished into the sky, certainly left nothing undone to aid, guide, and secure his companion ; so, despite its discomfort, he could not but feel that ‘the situation had its charm.’

'Thank heaven, we are almost at home now!' she exclaimed breathlessly. White, panting, and laughing the while, she clung to his arm, with both her hands interlaced upon it.

By this time they had reached the end of an avenue formed by double lines of magnificent palmettos, and before them rose the mansion of Mr. Bellingham, which was exactly—though, perhaps, more magnificent—built upon the same model used by all West Indian planters. It was of wood, partly raised upon handsome pillars, and consisted of a single floor. A long gallery, called a piazza, ran the whole length of the edifice, and terminated at each end in a large square room. On each side of this piazza were the bedchambers and other apartments, with stately balustrades and flights of steps descending to the lawn.

Around the whole mansion was a spacious verandah, with movable venetian blinds to admit the air. One of the end rooms alone had sash-windows, because of the rains, which, when they come, are so heavy, and shift suddenly with the wind from side to side, that all blinds in a West Indian house are obliged to be kept closed, and consequently, while they last, the rooms are all in oppressive darkness, save that which has the sashed windows.

So intent was Vere, after bestowing a single glance at the residence, upon assisting his drooping (and certainly dripping) companion up the flight of steps which led to the entrance-door, that he failed at first to see a fine-looking old man with silver hair, whose gentlemanly air and bearing, his loose jacket, vest, and pantaloons, all of them white stuff, and his broad straw hat, with a brim of twelve inches beyond the crown, could not disguise or conceal.

'My dear child,' he exclaimed, starting forward and taking her in his arms with tender anxiety, 'you have not suffered any injury? You look so pale, Virginia.'

'O papa, it is nothing; I am only wet, and, but for this gentleman, might have been blown quite away. He has brought me here so nicely, so kindly.'

'Sir, I thank you,' said Mr. Bellingham, lifting his hat and

presenting his hand with a friendly grasp. 'I despatched negroes in every direction to search ; but in vain. The fellows are getting too lazy and sulky to work, and we can't whip them now, as we used to do in the good old times.'

'We heard them blowing conch-shells, however,' said Miss Bellingham, letting down the wetted masses of her glorious hair.

'Though over-joyed to see my girl safe, I was somewhat scared on seeing her approach clinging to a perfect stranger.'

'I shall not say good-bye, though I give you all my thanks ; for I know papa too well to think he will let you depart in this storm. But I must leave you and change my dress,' said Miss Bellingham, as she laughingly ran along the piazza to her room.

'And you, too, must change your dress, and dine with us, Mr. ——'

'Vere. I command the detachment that came lately into Morant Bay.'

'Where, if all tales be true, you have not come a bit too soon. But I am glad to see you, sir, at Mango Garden ; and now for some brandy-and-water, and then a change of attire. We dine in less than hour.'

And apart from gratitude for having been of service to his daughter, Mr. Bellingham, with that warmth of hospitality which is so truly West Indian, welcomed Vere to his house and table all the more heartily that he was a stranger, a soldier, and a bearer of the Queen's commission—one's best passport in our colonies. And soon after, when this young lady, who, assisted by a little negro girl, had made a rapid toilette, and entered the drawing-room looking, save that the masses of her damp hair were left still loose—looking as perfect in attire and bearing as if she had neither been sodden nor scared—she fairly laughed outright on beholding Vere clad in a white suit of her father's—the same kind of attire in which the old gentleman went about the cane-fields and sugar-mills, but a world too small for the tall and broad-chested figure of Vere ; yet very handsome he seemed to look in it for all that, and so Virginia thought.

As Vere looked about him, the story of Manuel *Moreno* came unpleasantly to his memory, when it was recalled by an exhibition of the old gentleman's family pride, by drawing his attention to a faded and sorely-cracked old portrait of that Colonel Bellingham who had come out with Penn and Venables, in the days when the conquering Cromwellians traversed Jamaica in their steeple-crowned hats, falling bands, and buff coats, fighting the Spaniards in the tropics clad in the same uncouth attire with which they met the Cavaliers at Naseby and the Scots at Dunbar.

'My daughter, Mr. Vere, is said to bear a remarkable likeness to the worthy colonel,' said Mr. Bellingham; 'and it is singular how, in good families, likenesses are reproduced in successive generations.'

Vere, however, failed to see it in this instance, as the nose of Colonel Bellingham was like nothing else but a huge potato, in which it resembled the 'Bardolph snout' of his leader the Protector.

'And so your name is Vere?' said the old gentleman, after a pause.

'Vere of the Eighth.'

'A well-known name to me, sir; we have had one in our family. My ancestor, Colonel Bellingham, when he came here in the days of the Commonwealth, brought with him his wife Priscilla, a worthy dame, who came of the old Essex Veres, like Sir Horace, who was Lord of Tilbury, and his more famous brother Sir Francis. And from her he named the parish of Vere in this island, where the Braziletto Hills rise. So egad, sir, you may be a kinsman of ours, for all we know!'

Vere bowed, hoped it might be so; for certainly he would have no objection to claim so sweet a cousin as Virginia, even in the remote degree that Scotch and Welsh folks reckon.

Like all Creole girls, she had a languor in her beauty, in her motions, and in her eyes, that proved very captivating, and reminded Vere of some Eurasians he had seen in the

East. She had 'Cupid's fosses,' a dimple in each cheek, when she laughed ; and these always appeared at the most perilous moments, when her eyes were full of fun or coquetry. Yet when calm or in repose, and not excited about anything, her patrician face had a pensive expression, while its paleness—which was far removed from aught of a sickly pallor, but was creamy rather than white—was beautiful ; and then, though but a planter's daughter, she carried herself like a princess, with an exceeding and surpassing grace, which was one of her most potent charms ; and, as usual with all Creole girls, the English education had perfected all that seemed perfect enough before. She danced with grace, could sing divinely, play equally so, and knew the works of all the best current English authors ; but also, like Creole girls, she had their usual faults—an utter lack of industry, with an ignorance of domestic economy ; but as her father's heiress, and an only child, perhaps she could do without either.

The storm which had been the means of affording Vere his pleasant introduction to the household of Mango Garden passed away into the ocean. The evening was a fair, soft, and serene one ; but he was pressed to remain—for that night at least—the guest of Mr. Bellingham, and found himself, with that hospitality which is so genuinely West Indian, placed upon the footing of an old friend, with no attention omitted that might enhance his welcome.

The dinner was perfect—from the turtle soup to the desert of grenadillos in malmsey, and the pile of dewy mangosteens which Virginia, with her own white hands, arranged in the silver basket ; for she had the delicate touch and eye whereby some women can impart artistic taste to anything.

The great retinue of black servants somewhat reminded Vere of Bengal, save that in Jamaica they were fully clothed from head to foot ; and one—Mr. Bellingham's special valet—a negro named Quashy, of gigantic stature, and certainly ferocious aspect, wore a species of livery, and, having been born on the estate, though of slave parents, spoke tolerable English.

After dinner Miss Bellingham opened her piano ; and Vere soon discovered that she could play with skill and sing with exquisite taste, without afflicting the listener with those drawing-room ‘heartrendings’ which are generally so much in vogue ; and as hour pleasantly succeeded hour, Vere could scarcely realise the idea that he was quite established as an *ami de la maison* at Mango Garden, and seated beside the beautiful Virginia Bellingham, of whom he had heard so much at the mess, the Admiral’s Pen, and elsewhere.

CHAPTER XIX.

‘MAMMON WINS HIS WAY.’

LONG ere the time referred to in our last chapter, Lady Templeton and her daughters had been again in London—back again to town—back to the old routine of balls and routs, *fêtes*, flower-shows, and, as the season advanced, to garden-parties, a drawing-room or two, to polo at Lillie Bridge, dinners at Richmond, the ride in the Row, the drive in the Park, as of old, ere Gertrude knew Vere, and ere he left England and her. But this routine—no novelty now—was to be varied by a marriage in the family—the marriage of poor little Rosamund—after which tragedy Gertrude hoped they would all go back to Ringwood Hall.

Ere they had left the latter for London, she had been compelled to comport herself as if no gloom had fallen upon her heart, to act in charades, and to sing in duets—the beloved old duets in which the voice of Vere, so well attuned, had replied to, or mingled with, her own, so that when she sang with others she always felt as if Herbert were hovering near her chair, and was not far, far away ; and in these, as in other scenes, she had to bear her part with an ever smiling face, while marvelling if, amid all the throng in which she mingled, and which buzzed so rapidly around her, there was another woman who, like herself, sighed for the sound of a hushed voice, and for an absent face she never more might see.

How often now, amid these gay crowds and brilliant, yet inexpressibly dreary—because heartless—scenes, did all, at times, seem to fade away and be replaced by that twilight meeting at the mossy stile, and that bustling scene when the soldiers marched so merrily from Aldershot, and none seemed sad save him, whose wistful eyes met hers, so inquiringly and upbraidingly, for the last time !

Truly there was an amount of enthusiasm, with earnest and pure love, in the heart of Gertrude, which her mother would have deemed alike ‘bosh’ and ‘bad form.’

Of the movements of Herbert, whom she was quite conscious of having used so ill, while influenced by a cruel misconception, she knew nothing and had heard nothing. Opposite his name in the *Army List*, as well as opposite those of Kyrle Desborough, Toby Finch, and some others, she saw the letter *d*, as ‘detached,’ and she was aware that their companies were still in Jamaica.

After her cutting treatment of him, did he still treasure her memory, and still love her in thought ? It was more than she deserved—more than she could hope ; and to what end or purpose was the hope fostered or brooded over now !

Vere had now been gone for several months. The rest of the battalion had not followed the three companies that were sent off in such hot haste ; she was sure of that, as she had watched the papers, and made casual inquiries of those who were well up in such matters ; so, surely, these three companies would return when the expected troubles in Jamaica were over. The first month or year of separation proves generally the longest. The longest ? Her separation seemed final, because it was her own doing, her mother’s influence, and, lastly, Jocelyn Derinzy’s guile. Oh, how she loathed Derinzy, with his fair fly-away whiskers, china-blue eyes, and calm insouciance ; his general air of boredom, as if it were too great a trouble to exist on God’s fair earth in any way ! If time goes on, she fears she may not miss Vere so much as she does now, and Gertrude shrinks from such an anticipation ; and he—he who has no real reason to remember her

lovingly and trustingly—even kindly, but only as a cold, calculating, and selfish girl, who treated him insolently—O Heavens, yes, insolently!—will he not seek the love of another?

Thus, by a species of mental vivisection, did Gertrude laboriously torment herself, while recalling ever and anon the expression of his passion-pale face on that night they met and parted at the stile, and the wistful—ay, half-despairing—glance which met her stony stare at Farnborough Station. With all these thoughts in her mind, she was never permitted by Lady Templeton to forget the views the latter entertained with regard to the colonel. Derinzy had been wild—nay, was a little wild, perhaps, yet—the matron would say, ‘he must have his fling—all young men have.’ But even Maud admitted that the future viscount was a ‘mild’ five-and-thirty now.

Lady Templeton was in a high state of elation. Sir Ayling Aldwinkle’s solicitor, by a single cheque on Coutts and Co., had swept away all her pestilent encumbrances, and Rosamund’s magnificent settlements were all as secure as the Bank of England.

‘And Winklestoke, my darling child,’ she urged, ‘is a veritable Aladdin’s palace.’

‘Without the roc’s eggs so coveted,’ simpered the elderly lover.

‘Oh, that is in the West Indies,’ thought Maud, with a cold glitter in her eye.

So, on the day her doom was irrevocably fixed, poor Rosamund came listlessly to breakfast, left her letters unopened, ate nothing, was silent and *distracte*. The wretched meal over, she wandered—as one who would leave all thought behind her—listlessly from the drawing-room to the library, the conservatory, and the music-room. Then she opened a piano; the air she struck on, mechanically, was full of memories of *him*, and her eyes filled with hot and unbidden tears.

She had hoped against hope itself that ‘something would

turn up' (as Mr. Micawber says) to change her dreary destiny ; but all chance of that was past now, and she abandoned herself to the current of Fate as unresistingly as if she was being swept down the current of Niagara ; and when her mother said, 'Do not look at me, my child, as if I were injuring you, instead of doing my best to serve your interests as a loving mother and friend,' she shivered with disgust at the heartlessness with which she felt she was sold—literally sold like so much land—and sacrificed to keep up appearances.

'O mamma, is there nothing in your own heart—no memory of your girlhood,' she urged piteously, 'that will speak for me in such a time as this?'

'None,' was the grim reply. 'I was never at any time given to sickly sentimentality,' she added, as some rumour had been given her of a secret attachment somewhere. 'Forget your visionary hopes and degrading regrets, and remember that your fanciful troubles are somewhat small as compared with what mine would have been had not Sir Ayling acted in the princely manner he has done.'

It is only after a free indulgence of grief that the heart first feels a species of respite from it—a respite that may be born of great weariness ; so it was with Rosamund Templeton, who now became calm, but still remained wretched.

It was hot and breathless August now, and the London season was long since past and over ; so very few were in town to speculate on the subject of her marriage, when the day came, as it did, inexorably.

'Rosamund Templeton,' said Lady Grundy, 'is actually about to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather, and for the sake of his money—it can't be his title, for she is a peer's daughter, and he is only a baronet—a girl just eighteen ! It is an abyss of degradation, my dear !'

She was always, others said, self-willed, ambitious—unlike other girls—odd, and hoidenish. Yet sweet little Rosamund was none of these ; only her good-natured 'friends' misjudged, while anxiously looking forward to the magnificence of her routs, receptions, and drums after the honeymoon had waned.

‘Oh, that I might die before night!’ was the first thought of the poor girl on her marriage morning; but she felt that she was too young and strong, and too full of life, to find such an escape. Yet the pallor of her wan face, the strange, and hunted expression of her eyes, and the deep shades beneath, would not be concealed.

‘Rosamund!’ exclaimed her mother, with more asperity than sympathy, ‘this is intolerable—you must pull yourself together, if one may use such a phrase.’

‘You, I know, are sorry for me, Gertrude,’ whispered the girl, as she nestled her sad little face in the white neck of her sister, whose tears mingled with their kisses; and so the morning of the marriage day crept on.

‘How many brides go to the altar with hearts that would bear inspection by the men who take them there?’ asks the author of the ‘Moonstone.’

With what horror Rosamund looked upon the bridal dress she was to wear—evening dress in the glare of the August noon! Yet it was, as Lady Templeton said, perfect, and quite in accordance with her family and the position of her intended husband; and she had but one thought, that a correct description of it should be sent to the *Morning Post* and *Court Circular*, that all the world might know it was ‘a dress of rich white duchesse satin, with transparent sleeves of point de gaze: that the skirt was all ornamented with orange-blossoms and gardenias over plessis of satin; and that a Brussels lace veil completed her toilette.’

Then would follow a description of her jewels and presents, with the costume of her six bridesmaids, with the inevitable enamel locket, the gift of the bridegroom, with the bride’s initials on one side, and his armorial bearings on the other—quarterly—first and fourth, *azure*, three winkles, *argent*; second and third, *gules*, three periwinkles, *or*; and the ancient motto, ‘*Volo, non valeo*.’

To Rosamund the whole details of the morning, the rapturous expressions of the maid who attended her, of her bridesmaids, their kisses, and the sham congratulations of four (in

addition to Maud and Gertrude),—all seemed portions of a hideous dream. So seemed the very brightness of the sun, though she was of course reminded that happy was the bride the sun shone on ; and, like one in a dream, she found herself taking the arm of her brother, Lord Templeton, a cheeky young specimen of an Eton lad, who thought the whole affair great fun, and was much disposed 'to chaff his intended brother-in-law, and might have done so, but for the wretchedness he read in his sister's face as he led her into that famous temple of Hymen, St. George's, Hanover Square, 'the fashionable marriage shop,' as his little lordship called it to his horrified mamma ; 'a shop,' he added, 'which should be dedicated, not to St. George, but St. Valentine.'

CHAPTER XX.

ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE.

FOR more than a century this famous, yet far from magnificent, fane has been preferentially the temple dedicated for the celebration of fashionable bridals. It was built in the time of George I., when all taste was at its lowest ebb, on ground belonging to an old Whig general ; and it was named, not out of compliment to the slayer of the dragon, but as a graceful tribute to the first sovereign of the House of Hanover, who condescended to reign over these realms. For years it was celebrated for the marriages of enemies of the House of Stuart alone.

Since those days in that fane how many thousands of fair fingers have been encircled by the mystic emblem of eternity ; and how many thousands have knelt before its communion rails, mumbling hastily and nervously, in confusion, that portion of the Book of Common Prayer devoted to the solemnisation of matrimony ! St. George's, Hanover Square ! Why, the very name of the church is associated only with groves of orange flowers and wedding favours ; with snowy veils encircling maiden brows, white satins, bouquets, and Brussels

lace ; with beauty and youth, blushes and tears, simpers and jokes, joy, wealth, and rank ; with Rimmel and Swan & Edgar.

Yet no more beautiful bride ever appeared before those well-worn hassocks than the now passive and pallid girl whom the young Lord Templeton led forward to hear, by the side of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, the words that were to bind her for life, after the quaint formula of the special license had been seen to.

The bewitchingly inquiring, we may almost call it insolent, little glance which Rosamund was apt to bestow on such a lover as Sir Ayling, and which seemed to express, 'Who or what on earth are you ?' was gone now, and never, never more would be in her sweet girlish face. Behind her, clad uniformly alike, with bouquets, came her six bridesmaids, four of whom, of course, were delighted with the idea of the bridal, and only too anxious to disport themselves thereat, feeling that they ranked only second in importance to the victim—for such she was ; so true is it that 'a man may marry the woman he wishes to marry, but a woman can only marry the man who wishes to marry *her*.'

If Sir Ayling Aldwinkle seemed absurd in the character of a lover, how much more was he absurd and odious in that of a bridegroom ! As one who, he not unnaturally conceived, was about to become a member of the Ringwood family circle, Sir Ayling had chosen the tall and *distingué*-looking Derinzy for his groomsman ; a dreadful mistake on his part, so far as comparison in personal appearance went.

The colonel's grandfather, the viscount, was alleged to be almost dying now ; so, fully countenanced by Lady Templeton, he was hovering near Gertrude ; and after his watery blue eyes had rested with a quizzical expression on the bridegroom, whose lean fingers had great difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of the wedding ring at the very moment it was wanted, they wandered over the ladies present, with the usual assumption of criticism, impertinence, and indifference they were wont to wear ; yet those he regarded thus had all the soft and rich patrician beauty of Tyburnian belles.

'I heard of this engagement at the club,' lisped a *blasé* brother Guardsman, 'but couldn't believe it—thought, if it existed at all, that it was only one of those affairs that are to be broken—not by death, but by the close of the season ; and here we are !—poor little goose ! or knave—'pon my soul, don't know which the girl is ! Jocelyn, you know the family well, I believe ?'

Derinzy's face darkened a little ; but he could not fail to overhear many similiar remarks from persons lured into the church by curiosity, the brilliance of the *cortége*, and the jingle of the marriage bells, and who contrasted the youth and beauty of the girl with the age of the ailing, but fashionably-attired, old pantaloons to whom she was consigned ; and much of contempt was mingled with their pity.

'He is very old, shaky, and all that,' said the former speaker ; 'it is a doocid mistake.'

'Perhaps,' replied Derinzy ; 'but some one has written that "the moment a girl is engaged to be married to a man, people seem to think they are privileged to abuse him."' "

'Ah, I never quote ; don't read much, you know. What's the use ?'

'Such a flutter Sir Ayling is in !' whispered another of the Brigade, Sir Ascot Softeigh.

'Poor old devil ! Feels himself an object of interest,' was the comment of some one else.

"Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare ;
And Mammon wins his way where seraphs might despair."

'But where the deuce is the glare here, man ?'

'In old Sir Ayling's cheque-book,' said Sir Ascot.

When the latter looked upon his bride, pure as the lily, there was a bright grey glitter in his usually fishy eyes ; and he chuckled to himself at the thought of how all those young fellows envied him, chuckled with an air that was half mischievous, half malicious, and wholly triumphant ; and to Gertrude, who looked on with her heart full of intense pity, with his thin aristocratic nose and pointed chin, he seemed a

kind of veteran Mephistopheles in the smartest of morning costume ; and as she knelt with Maud and the four other bridesmaids at the altar, she marvelled in her heart with whom, if ever, she would kneel, as Rosamund was now doing, in such a place.

Not with Vere, she was assured, and not with Derinzy, she prayed in her inmost heart. The sacrifice made by the hapless Rosamund had saved them from monetary trouble and all its contingent speculation and discomfort, if not shame. No other victim was required ; thus, if further tyranny were attempted with her, she thought she could be a governess, deaconness, sister of mercy, or something else, it mattered not what. Brought up as she had been, the thought of poverty scared her ; but surely all dread of *that* was passed now ; and some people might think that Rosamund had only attained early the full desire of the belle of the season—marriage with the richest bachelor ; but poor Rosamund was just ‘out,’ and, oh, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was such a terrible bachelor ! And all these wretched ideas floated through the mind of the girl, kneeling there in all her bridesmaid’s bravery, while the solemn words of the sixty-seventh psalm were in progress on the other side of the altar rails.

Passive and indifferent to all around her though Rosamund had become, she was sensible of a singular start given by Sir Ayling Aldwinkle during one part of the ceremony, and also of a glance, almost a frown, his eyes gave towards a certain pillar of the church. Those of Rosamund travelled mechanically in the same direction, and she encountered for a moment the fixed, steady, and hostile, yet somewhat sad, gaze of a stranger, a rather plainly clad but handsome woman, who, on finding herself discovered, shrunk hastily back, mingled with the crowd, and disappeared.

This was the only incident of the day—a trivial one, but one which Rosamund was fated to recall at a future time—that roused her for a moment from the apathy in which she was sunk—she, the sacrifice, the hapless victim of the Templeton family ; and when next she roused herself she was in

he vestry, with congratulatory friends crowding about ; and we are bound to record the fact that, when her mother kissed her, one solitary tear *did* appear in each of the cold and glittering eyes of that noble dowager ; and then, to the resounding notes of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, she went forth, as in a dream, leaning on the arm of her husband.

Then followed in all its usual routine and splendour the marriage breakfast, at which the little Lord Templeton got tight as a drum,' as he phrased it, and at which Gertrude obtained, in the most casual way, some information that gave her food for thought for some time to come.

Among the bridesmaids there chanced to be a Miss Finch, a merry, bright-eyed girl, a relation of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle and sister of our friend Toby of the Eighth, who was then amusing himself with sundry flirtations in the neighbourhood of Morant Bay ; and from her Gertrude heard something she would rather *not* have heard ; for we are compelled sometimes to hear that which we never can forget.

Had she heard from her brother lately ? It was Maud who asked the simple question, but with that serene indifference and composure of manner that belonged to Maud and no one else.

Oh, yes, she had heard from poor Toby by nearly every mail since he left Southampton ; he was a dear kind brother, and so fond of her !

Had he given her any news of his friends in the Eighth ?

Oh, yes ; Toby had told her a good deal about his particular friend Vere especially, added the girl, laughing.

What was it ? asked Maud of a purpose.

Herbert Vere had fallen most desperately in love with a beautiful Creole, or the beautiful Creole had fallen most desperately in love with him—she forgot which—the belle of Jamaica, whose papa had become so attached to Vere, that the latter was quite neglecting all his military duties, and had actually taken up his residence at the fair one's—or rather, she supposed, dark one's—house, Cucumber Garden, or some such funny name.

Gertrude turned away, for she felt that the somewhat mischievous eyes of Maud were upon her. She had listened to all this and even more, told in the way of girlish gossip and small-talk; and as she did so, she felt the blood rush to her pale face, and a sick faintness steal over her; while the buzz, brilliance, and gaiety of the marriage breakfast seemed a species of phantasmagoria, and the stately room, with all its fashionable guests around her, like a whirlpool of bright laughing faces, costumes, light, and colour.

Then an enforced calmness possessed her, and she was compelled to say in her heart,

‘What right have I to be sorry or glad—interested in any way—with news from the West Indies? He may love—yes, he may marry his Creole girl, if he chooses; but he can never forget the time when *I* was all the world to him!’

Between him and her, there was neither tie nor confidence; and ‘confidence,’ says Florence Marryat, ‘is the very soul of love, without which it has but a temporary existence. True deep-rooted love is not a plant of such delicate growth that it can be torn up and cast out to wither in a day.’

Gertrude thought of this, and also that, if he actually loved this seductive West Indian girl—for that she must be seductive, jealousy left her not a doubt—then in that case his passion for herself could not have been a deep-rooted one.

Her classic beauty roused at that moment the genuine admiration of Derinzy, while her listlessness of manner piqued his pride. She looked so charming, with a soft delicate loveliness that only wanted the animation she cared not to give it to become brilliant; but when he addressed her once or twice in his capacity of groomsman, she barely answered him, and he drew back, twirling his long moustache with a ‘worried’ air.

The ‘season’ was long since over, and Gertrude had gone through it all uncomplainingly—a model of patience. It had dragged itself to an end; and Rosamund’s marriage was to be the sequel, so far as the Ringwood family was concerned. Gertrude with wonder heard people declare it to have been

the gayest and most delightful season heard of in London for years.

To her it seemed a monotonous memory of crowded drawing-rooms, where she and others waxed pale in the glare of lamps (and the perfume produced by exotics and Rimmel), as they sighed for the wandering breeze that came from a curtained balcony or staircase.

The beautiful West Indian ! Was it jealousy made Gertrude Templeton repeat these words to herself ever and anon ? If not, whence the bitter pang that seemed to shoot through her heart, and yet to linger there ? But what reason had she to be jealous ? Had she not by her own lips forbidden him to hope, thus thrusting his heart on himself, and on any woman who would have it ? and, more than all, had she not finally put upon him an insult by her manner—after *all* that had passed between them—inexplicable, and unexplainable, apparently now ?

Yet her heart ached with pain at the idea of him being happy with a new love : he was once so good and loyal tender and true, to herself ; and now, in fancy, she saw the eyes that had whilom turned so lovingly to her own looking down on this new face ; and thus, as her jealousy ‘made the food’ it fed on, she deplored that she had ever seen, ever known, or learned to love, Herbert Vere.

How she courted solitude, and longed to be again at Ringwood Hall ! There, in loneliness, she had the liberty of indulging in her own thoughts ; but in society she felt the slavery of having to interest herself in persons, places, and things she cared nothing about, and had to go through the world with a perpetual company-smile on her lips—it seldom reached her eyes now.

When again she heard of Herbert Vere, it was through the medium of the public prints, when affairs in Jamaica had come to the musket at last ; and such wild work was being enacted there as the Antilles had not seen since the terrible old Maroon war ; and amid the perils of that wild work his life was hourly cast.

But now she was roused from thought by a general movement of the whole company ; the bride had changed her costume, and was about to leave her paternal home for ever.

The carriage, with four magnificent high-stepping greys, was at the door ; and Sir Ayling, his old heart swelling with all the pride of proprietary—feeling that she is mine—mine—*mine*—appeared, hat in hand, with a thin dust-coat thrown over one arm.

‘ Miss Rosamund, are you ready ? ’ he asked, smiling.

Whereupon Maud whispered to Lady Templeton that it was a bad omen, surely, in him to forget already that she was Lady Aldwinkle.

‘ Folly ! ’ said the dowager ; ‘ how can you think of such trifles ? ’

There was no superstition of the heart about *her*.

Heedless of the genuine English well-bred horror of a ‘ scene,’ or exhibiting any human emotion, Rosamund clung passionately to the neck of Gertrude, and whispered :

‘ Oh, Gerty, my darling, my darling, if you do not marry Vere, die rather than do as I have done ! ’

At last all the stereotyped kisses had been exchanged, smiles exhibited, tears shed, and, amid showers of rice, to which were added a few old slippers from the adjacent area, ‘ the happy couple ’ took their departure, and then the guests, with the usual conviction that a marriage is but a dreary affair in general, began to take their departure, and soon silence reigned in the drawing-rooms and great dining-hall of the Ringwood family.

The last to depart was Jocelyn Derinzy, who did so with an air of as much discontent as it was possible for a creature so magnificent, solemn, and unimpressible to exhibit.

‘ You have grossly affronted the colonel, Gertrude ! ’ said Lady Templeton, with some severity of tone ; ‘ and only think of *your* doing so on this most important day too ! ’

‘ Have I, mamma ? ’ asked Gertrude wearily.

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well, mamma, if he chooses to be offended, what of it ? ’

'Only this trifle—that I hope you are satisfied now, by having, perhaps, by your bearing before all these guests—a bearing in the worst possible form—lost, perhaps, the title of viscountess, with settlements only second to those of your fortunate younger sister.'

'I was only weary, mamma—wearied and *distracted*.'

'Wherefore *distracted* on a day of joy?' asked the dowager snappishly and lottily.

'I fear some unmeaning remarks of Miss Finch have upset Gertrude,' said Maud, unclasping two magnificent bracelets Sir Ayling had given her.

'Oh, about *that* Mr. Vere, I believe!' said Lady Templeton; and Gertrude winced at the relative pronoun and her mother's more than usually cutting tone. 'I have read, truly, somewhere, once let a woman "fancy a man to be a hero, a martyr, a patriot, or any other uncomfortable celebrity certain to make a bad husband, and she will be ready to throw herself at his head, just as if such is not the very last man in the world she ought to select."'

'I am not aware, mamma, that Mr. Vere of the Eighth is either a hero or a martyr,' replied Gertrude, with difficulty restraining her tears, and seeming still to hear the wheels that bore away her beloved little sister; 'nor have I selected him for a husband.'

'Those are the wisest words you have uttered for some time, my dear. Marriage may be the affair of a lifetime, even between couples with some disparity in their years, as there is in those of Rosamund and Sir Ayling; but his settlements were princely, princely,' added Lady Templeton, fanning herself; 'and *next* time—we know not what may happen—our Rosamund may choose for herself. Indeed, Sir Ascot Softeigh, after he had taken too much champagne, said almost as much to me this morning.'

'For such a remark his name should be struck off our lists,' said Gertrude, thinking the while how heartless the speech of her mother was.

Long, long years might follow that wedding; but for Rosa-

mund, *not* for Sir Ayling Aldwinkle certainly. It was a marriage that for Rosamund had no future; it could only be some years of calm misery, vacuity, and then, perhaps, with all 'the princely settlements,' perhaps an aimless and hopeless widowhood.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARRIVAL OF THE BRIDE.

IN preference to the Continent, where they were certain to meet every one they knew, the newly-wedded pair proceeded by train to the country seat of Sir Ayling, the carriage and horses being all transferred to the trucks, as if by magic, at St. Pancras.

'No good can come of such a marriage!' said the most gentle and charitable; while the malevolent and gossip-loving echoed the words to the full, but in a different spirit, and with very different anticipations.

And charming looked the beautiful, though touchingly pale, girl in her travelling dress, which was so suited to her blonde complexion and golden-tinted hair, pearl-grey silk, with a bonnet so tiny that it seemed to consist of a single feather formed into a circle, and the white veil of which she kept tied tightly under her chin, too tightly, Sir Ayling thought.

Of his words and caresses she was almost oblivious; she heard the former and shrinkingly endured the latter, as one in a horrible dream; while the *coupé* in which they were seated sped on with the train, in a second-class carriage of which, no doubt, his valets and her maid were having their own servant's-hall jokes over the whole affair.

Rosamund felt as if all the world were one mass of unreality. Married—all was over—there could be no reprieve but death—no going back now. The thought—the conviction—terrified and stunned her!

'Ah,' she thought, 'how true it is that we cannot serve God and Mammon; and at the altar of the latter most

cruelly has my life been laid down to-day ! Plays and novels always close with a wedding, as if life ended there. Oh, would that it did, so far as I am concerned !

But ever before her was the thought of the grim and receding future—the horrible, cheerless, joyless, unloved, and unloving future.

Rosamund was a curious compound, and, with all her hoidenish love of gaiety, was wont to spend hours in the old shady library at Ringwood Hall, among books antique, quaint, and forgotten now. There the somewhat parallel sorrows of Julia de Roubigne had made a deep impression upon the girl, as the matrimonial net was being woven around her ; and now, when shrinking from Sir Ayling's arm and side, she recalled a letter, where the heroine writes to her friend : ' Maria, in my hours of visionary indulgence, I have often painted to myself one—no matter whom—comforting me amidst the distresses which misfortune had laid upon me. I have smiled upon him through my tears—tears not of anguish, but of tenderness ; our children were playing around us, unconscious of misfortune ; we taught them to be humble and be happy ; our little shed was reserved to us, and their smiles to cheer it. I have imagined the luxury of such a scene, and affliction became a part of my dream of happiness.'

But of the latter there could be none in store for Rosamund, and her thoughts were sad and terrible for an enthusiastic young girl on her marriage day ; yet she made a resolute attempt to appear composed and to listen to Sir Ayling, who, perceiving that she *did* recoil from his blandishments, as he flattered himself, in childish or girlish fear, was good-natured enough to attempt to interest her in the passing objects—spires, villages, woodlands, and uplands—now steeped in all the golden glory of an August sun, while ever and anon he looked at his watch and calculated to a nicety the time at which they must reach the station and quit the train for Winklestoke.

But ever and always, out of the chaos of her thoughts and of all that seemed to gather round her, came the strange face

and wistful eyes of the woman she had seen in the church, and the general expression of whose sharp features had an unwarrantable and most unpleasant fascination for Rosamund, who strove not to think about her.

Once again they were in a well-hung and luxuriously-cushioned family carriage, with its four grey high-steppers in their flashing silver harness, followed by a mail-cart with all their luggage. The well-wooded roads were swiftly traversed in the deepening twilight ; ere long the lodge-gates of Winklestone were past, and the preparations there to 'welcome home the bride' brought neither joy nor satisfaction to the suffering heart of Rosamund ; but they were all to be undergone, nevertheless.

There were the cheers of the tenantry, the shouts of the Giles Chawbacons and Timothy Tugmuttons in canvas frocks and hobnailed shoes ; the dreadful music discoursed by the band of the Aldwinkle Rifle Volunteers on the lawn ; an address, delivered by a steward, butler, or some one in black, at a triumphal arch of evergreens, while the village bells chimed pleasantly in the distance ; and then Sir Ayling handed his bride from the depths of the carriage at the open door of a stately old English mansion, where the now world-weary girl became an object of intense interest, admiration, and too evidently some little commiseration to the whole household assembled in the hall, through which she had to pass, between two lines of them facing inwards, all curtsying or bowing, their faces wreathed in smiles got up for the occasion.

Undoubtedly Winklestone looked like what it really was, a magnificent old mansion, to the aching eyes of Rosamund, as the carriage, with its stately high steppers, swept up to the perron that led to the grand entrance, whence a flood of warm light seemed to gush into the evening outside. It was Tudoresque, and somewhat in the style of Ringwood Hall, but twice its size, and had in its substructure some fragments of the Norman castle, built upon the site of the old Stoke or wooden dwelling of the Saxon Winkles of Aldwinkle.

The great stone staircase reminded Rosamund of Hampton

Court, especially as it was all frescoed by the brush of the same decorator who adorned that palace, Antonio Verrio, who died in the year of the Union, 1707, and whose florid designs—gods, goddesses, fruit, flowers—covered the walls pell-mell. This staircase was vast in size and extent, and its shadows would have been ghostly, but for the flood of light from a vast chandelier, which pervaded every part of it.

Off it opened a stone-flagged hall, having a mighty oaken table and high square-backed chairs, in which old Noll had sat with Monk, Hesilrig, and others, when on the march to Scotland, greatly to the disgust of the then lord of Winklestone. On the walls were Vandykes, Lelys, and so forth, in faded frames. In other rooms was furniture of Queen Anne's days—settees whereon Addison might have lounged, or Clarissa Harlowe have graciously accorded the tips of her fairy fingers to Sir Charles Grandison, while kneeling before her 'refulgent magnificence;' and there were brass-bound escritoirs, at which she might have penned her replies to her solemn, distant, and courteous adorer. On every hand there seemed to open long suites of old-fashioned rooms, panelled with oak, hung with pictures and heavy draperies.

Everything was stately and grand, and bore the impress of rank and family; but as the girl looked wearily around her she thought she should have preferred 'the shed' of Julia de Roubigne better, if the said dwelling, however humble, were to be shared with Kyrle Desborough.

While Sir Ayling repaired to the stately dining-room, where a paragon of respectable butlers poured out some refreshing beverage for his delectation and mumbled his congratulations, Rosamund was conducted by her maid to the rooms that were prepared for her; and, notwithstanding all that she had seen and been accustomed to in London and elsewhere, their luxury, splendour, and the general atmosphere of wealth and taste that pervaded them could not fail to impress the girl, all weary and heart-stricken though she was.

Wax candles in blue Sèvres branches lighted the gilt tables and carved mantelpieces of white marble, which were exqui-

sitely garlanded with flowers. No fires were in the grates, the month being August, but they were marvels of elegance and polished steel, and filled with artificial flowers. The draperies were of the most delicate satin, the boudoir and dressing-room were miracles of taste and elaboration, and the low Arabian bed looked as if meant for the bride of Aladdin, save that it had around it rugs that were pure white, and soft as the bosom of a swan, the softest and downiest that Siberia could furnish.

Her maid deposited Rosamund's magnificent morocco travelling-bag, and hastened to relieve her of her shawl, when the girl, whose whole soul at that moment was longing for the voice, the presence, and the kiss of her sister Gertrude, said, petulantly and half imperiously, as if now thoroughly hunted and worried :

'Leave me, please, for a little time ; when I require you I will ring.'

On this the girl curtsied and withdrew, to make her report in the servants' hall, and compare notes with the gossiping and now fairly-wondering denizens of that locality, to whom the extreme youth of the bride was a source of immense speculation ; so much so that even her beauty was forgotten amid it, by the women at least.

But the moment the girl left her, and Rosamund found herself alone, the kind of false excitement which had sustained her since the morning, since the time she had been in the hands of fashionable *modistes* and bridesmaids, now completely gave way ; the room swam round her, she sank upon a sofa, and felt as if she were dying.

And with a prayer in her heart and on her pallid lips, she earnestly hoped she was so, as sight and sound left her and she became perfectly insensible.

Half an hour, an hour, passed away ; the bridegroom fidgeted about the dining-room, sipping some Chablis from time to time, and comparing his watch with the great ormulu clock above the mantelpiece.

'Lady—Lady Aldwinkle is very long. What can detain

her thus ?' he muttered aloud. 'Oh, doubtless her maid is giving a finishing touch for the fiftieth time to some part of her costume. Ah, the little rogue is anxious to please me, after all !'

And then the old fellow chuckled as he surveyed the remains of what had undeniably been a handsome young face some forty years ago, and thought what 'a sad dog' he was yet.

At last he rang the bell and desired the maid a little impatiently to see after her mistress, who he was confounded to find had been all this time in her room alone.

The abigail knocked again and again without receiving the faintest response.

'She's asleep !' thought the girl, opening the door softly ; 'and how deadly pale she looks !' she added, as she saw the breathless figure recumbent on the sofa, with a face white as Carrara marble reposing on an outstretched arm.

Something of indefinable awe and dread crept over the girl, or rather superseded surprise ; for she thought that *she* would not have slept or been 'taken like this' on her marriage night. She drew nearer, and her dread deepened. The dark lashes lay still and motionless on the marble cheek, without the slightest quiver or flicker, and the pale face looked painfully, terribly still in its marble-like repose.

A piercing shriek escaped the girl, who rushed from the apartment, and came flying like a scared bird down the grand staircase.

'Dead—dead—my mistress is dead !'

Such was the wild cry with which she startled the household of Winklestone, inspiring a panic of horror in the hearts of all ; but certainly in none more than poor old Sir Ayling, who became almost palsied with terror.

Selfish, feeble, and superstitious, with weakness that was childish and unpardonable in his horror of a dead thing, this old man, so near his own grave, dared not go near her, touch her, or look upon her, the lovely bride of that auspicious morning, and around whose shrinking form his lean arm had been lovingly the live-long day ; and a tumult of terrible and aggravating, rather than sorrowful, thoughts swept over him.

Ill, dying, dead, or what, upon her bridal night ! If the story got abroad, as it must do, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, who loathed scenes, worry, speculations, and explanations, 'and all that sort of thing,' instinctively and nervously beheld, with horrible anticipation, the newspaper paragraphs, the *post-mortem* examination, and the coroner's inquest, with all its morbid elucidations, evidence, pros and cons, learned vulgarity, and the prodigious excitement and *esclandre* of the whole affair in 'society,' that stupendous bugbear.

Mounted messengers scoured all the district for doctors ; the telegraphs to London and elsewhere were set to work. Sir Ayling drained the last of his Chablis, and sat in an arm-chair, polishing his bald head with a white silk handkerchief, and looking the picture of well-bred misery and woe as the night of his marriage—that most terrible night—wore on.

CHAPTER XXII.

VERE'S REFLECTIONS.

At the time of the ill-omened marriage we have just related, either Miss Finch or her brother Toby had greatly exaggerated, or at least anticipated, the state of affairs at Mango Garden.

Vere certainly did avail himself of the old planter's (Mr. Bellingham's) hospitality to remain in his mansion on the night of the storm ; and on that occasion, Vere, though as a soldier accustomed usually to be able to sleep anywhere and with a total indifference as to his surroundings, either from the closeness of the atmosphere or the chatter of the negroes outside and other external sounds, found sleep almost impossible, and for hours he gave way to reverie, in which thoughts of Gertrude, of Virginia, of Moreno and the discontented blacks, and then of Gertrude, again and again occurred to him.

The moon was shining brightly above the mountains, and at such a time the negroes are fond of sitting up the greater

part of the night in the verandahs, conversing and telling 'nancy stories,'—*i.e.* tales of ghosts and hobgoblins—or singing to the banjo, tambourine, and pipe ; but on this night, as there was a strong infusion of politics in the subjects of conversation, they were gesticulating violently, and chattering like so many monkeys—Quashy, the valet, taking the lead in everything, and being daringly noisy. And so, with their strange voices and occasional bursts of savage-like laughter in his ears, while watching the red fireflies flashing about near the open spars of the green jalousies, Vere thought with some surprise over the pleasant quarters in which he so suddenly found himself.

Virginia Bellingham was undoubtedly beautiful, and her image occurred to him again and again. Was this the effect of fancy, or the jolly planter's heady madeira ?

'Gertrude !' he muttered, 'God knows that from my heart I now wish that I had never seen—never, never known—you ! But hearts don't break nowadays.'

Brooding, he thought over all the stories he had heard, after the small hours at mess or elsewhere, told in a maudlin way, when brandy-pawnee and 'mild weeds' succeeded the wine, by fellows who became suddenly seized by tender memories or confidential fits, and who kept their faces unseen in shadow as they made, while inspired by some craving for sympathy or to excite interest, revelations they would never have done if quite sober or in the light of open day ; and he marvelled if a time would ever come when he too, a fogey, would play this game, 'and make a donkey of himself,' and be deemed a bore by subs. who were now at school.

Toby Finch, Clive, Prior, and the doctor, though all young comparatively, were wont to prose in this fashion when they had too much wine under their belts ; but Kyrle Desborough, though some years their senior, never indulged in this weakness, and usually proved a cynic listener and commentator. His story, whatever it was, and that he had a story none in the corps ever doubted, was a point too tender with him to be trotted out for speculation ; but all the mess

knew how Toby Finch had been jilted because his *innamorata* preferred a carriage and pair to himself ; how Clive's darling had died of a fever up-country on the very day they were to have been married ; how Prior's intended had been dazzled by a title, and just after he had despatched to her an epistle full of expressions of undying love he saw her marriage among the fashionable intelligence ; but the assistant-surgeon's 'escape from the noose,' as Desborough called it, was the strangest of all ; and always provoked the laughter of the mess, to whom he lugubriously related it when the night was far advanced.

When they were at Malta, he had become entangled with a bewitching little Maltese. Charlie had seen lots of pretty girls—ay, beautiful girls, he was wont to say—and had admired them only with the eye of an artist ; but now it seemed that the face of his Maltese belle, when, with her eyes sparkling under the black-lace faldetta, she smiled on him, was the only one in the world for him. They had met at the general's ball and many other places ; they had 'done' together all the delightful little excursions in the neighbourhood, the Gardens at Floriana, the ride to Sliema, the shady Boschetto, and all the lions of the two islands ; they had flirted in the boxes of old Manuel Vilhena's theatre, and even sought solitude and each other's society tenderly in the odious catacombs, where certainly the doctor found himself, in a manner, at home ; and the marriage day was actually fixed at last. So the doctor gave a farewell dinner to Desborough and a few other chums in the Auberge de Provence, where much more wine was consumed on the occasion than was good for the party, who drank the health of the bride and bridegroom, and extolled the beauty of the former again and again, till the time came for separating, and Charlie Capsicum and Desborough, steadying each other as best they could, betook them to the barracks, by those 'cursed streets of stairs' which Byron has anathematised, scrambling on, when the light of a golden dawn was beginning to tint the blue waves of the Mediterranean, and eclipse the lamps of the Madonnas at the corner of every street.

Dubious of their way, they had gradually ascended all the flights that lead to the Strada Reale, when Charlie gave a lurch, and was on the point of descending again with terrible rapidity, when the strong hand of Kyrle caught him ; but just in time.

'Take care, doctor,' he exclaimed, 'or by Jove there will be a vacancy in the medical list.'

'Oh, signore,' exclaimed a girl breathlessly, as she threw back her faldetta, 'are you a dottore ?'

'Bedad, he is, my dear ; do you want him ?' answered Kyrle.

'Oh, signore, oh, signori !' exclaimed the girl, in the greatest tribulation, 'come with me ; the signora is dying !'

'The signora—who ?'

Neither of the friends caught the name ; but they followed the girl into a handsome house, above the door of which was a tiny Madonna in a niche, with a lamp burning before it. Our doctor had not in excess the perceptive faculties at any time, and they were more than ever clouded now, when he was ushered into a luxurious chamber, where a lady was in bed, and seriously ill to all appearance.

Her face, half turned away, was a beautiful one, and seemed not unfamiliar to him ; or rather *their* faces, for between the wine he had imbibed, and more than one tumble he had had on the flight of stairs, Charlie Capsicum was sorely troubled in mind to decide whether he had one or two patients before him.

'The Signore Dottore has come *too late*,' said a lady, who was in attendance ; 'it is all over.'

'What is all over ?' asked Charlie, as the strange but very unmistakable voice of a little babe was heard like that of a cricket somewhere ; and then the patient, for there was but one, turned her pale face towards him, and a low cry escaped her when he recognised his intended. So there was the end of a great mystery ; and Charlie walked home to his quarters in St. Elmo a soberer man than ever he had been for months before ; and such was the reminiscence with which he was wont to favour the laughing lingerers at mess, after

more allowance of wine had gone round than the messman could reckon.

Vere thought over all these and other stories, we say, and wondered if *his* turn would ever come to be seized with absurd fits of confidence. No, no ; he would take a lesson by Kyrle Desborough, and be close as a smith's vice. Then he thought again of Virginia Bellingham, and fell asleep with the pleasant memory of her voice in his ear, and the knowledge that he was to meet her on the morrow.

Next day the planter would by no means hear of Vere returning to Morant Bay, urging that Finch could look after the detachment well enough, he had no doubt ; and Vere remembered that as it was Saturday there would be no parade ; moreover, he was his own commanding officer ; and then the grace with which Miss Bellingham, clad in the airiest of muslin morning costume, presided over the luxurious breakfast table, proved the strongest argument of all ; so Herbert Vere remained, yielding in spite of himself to the charm of her presence, and the piquancy of her manner.

Her dark and defined eyebrows were very slightly arched, but gave great character to her face ; and when she spoke her eyes dilated and sparkled, while the face itself possessed some subtle charm apart from the perfection of features. Her nose was straight and determined, as her mouth was delicate, feminine, and gentle. She was colourless, save such colour as the white rose has ; yet the girl was in full and perfect health, though in all her actions she seemed to Vere one of the most gracefully indolent fair ones he had ever met. She seemed to recline rather than sit, to glide rather than walk, but all this charming langour was the result of her West Indian rearing ; and she formed a wonderful contrast to the negro valet or factotum of her father, who hovered constantly near her chair, and seemed to have eyes for her wants and wishes alone, a tall powerful sable giant named Quashy, whose form was like that of a bronze Hercules, in whom every muscle, nerve, and fibre had been developed to an extreme by outdoor exercise ; and in whose

undoubtedly ferocious face on this morning a lowering expression seemed to hover.

Mr. Bellingham detected this, and inquired the reason.

Quashy asserted that he had seen a black cloud pass over Mango Garden that morning about dawn, and that in it he could distinctly see the eyes, mouth, and nose of his brother Pluto, who had died in the prison of Morant Bay, where he had been put for stealing game by Massa Ketelhodt; and at the name of that official his eyes shone with a lurid glare, and he showed all his white glistening teeth like a ground-shark.

'That will do, Quashy; you may go!' said Mr. Bellingham, with some annoyance of manner. 'You see, Mr. Vere, the spirit that is already manifesting itself so fast among these people. Matters are daily looking worse and worse, and we know not where the growing insolence of these blacks will end.'

Vere thought of the speaker's nephew Moreno, and of the startling contents of that individual's pocket-book; he thought also of the terrible vow recorded on the fly-leaf thereof, and his eyes naturally rested on Miss Bellingham; but he remained silent on the subject of her dangerous relative, whom it would have been bad taste to have mentioned.

'I have heard my grandfather—he was fourth in descent from the Cromwellian colonel—tell of the terrible atrocities incident to the revolt of the Maroons here in his time,' said Mr. Bellingham, 'when property to the value of nearly two millions was destroyed, and in one way or other seven hundred stalwart negroes were put to death. The aim of our blacks in the present day is simply to emulate that vast conspiracy, which in San Domingo had for its object the total extirpation of the whites, and the establishment of an independent negro government throughout the whole island. On that occasion, so profound was the secrecy, so perfect the cunning and dissimulation of the slaves, that the dreadful catastrophe was in no way apprehended till it burst with a fury surpassing the recent Indian Mutiny. In the night, the beautiful plains that lie in the north of Hispaniola were sheeted with fire, and the

labour of a hundred years, years of care and toil, perished in a few hours. Like tigers unchained the negroes flung themselves upon the unhappy planters and their families, massacred them without pity, and tossed them into the flames. In lieu of standards, the negroes marched with European infants on their pikes, and in the lust of their cruelty they slowly sawed many women asunder. What the negro was then he is *now*, while emancipation has only made him more cunning, sensual, lazy, and dangerous. All the wild work of those days we may expect to see acted here again at any hour,' added the old gentleman, glancing with some anxiety towards his smiling daughter.

'But the negroes here have been somewhat open in their proceedings,' replied Vere; 'and we are completely forewarned.'

'Happily so; yet, nevertheless, we live, as it were, with a volcano below our feet.'

Ere half the day had passed Vere was surprised to find how intimate he had become with his new friends, and how completely he was at home at Mango Garden; but this arose from his own frank geniality on one hand, and free-handed West Indian hospitality on the other.

Horses were ordered, and he accompanied Mr. Bellingham and his daughter over the sugar estate, which, as usual, was divided into portions—one-third in canes, one-third woodland, and one-third in luxuriant pasturage; and the old gentleman, having some important business to conduct with his overseer, ere long left Vere to the guidance of Miss Bellingham, who showed him the vast mills, which were worked by mules when there was no water; the boiling-houses with all their mysterious assortment of pans and boilers; and the hundreds of negroes at work as clarifiers, distillers, carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, and smiths, and all singing so merrily, and chattering so gaily over their work, that it seemed impossible to suspect that secret thoughts of revolt and massacre were lurking in their hearts. There, too, were others at work upon the boxes of indigo, coffee, chocolate, pimento, and

ginger for exportation, all bearing evidence of the industry and wealth of the owner of Mango Garden.

So most of the afternoon was passed in the society of its heiress ; and as she and Vere slowly rode under the avenues formed by foliage the most beautiful and varied in the world, they permitted the reins to drop on their horses' necks as they idled along, or only paused when she drew Vere's attention to some distant view of the dark blue sea, as seen through some long green vista of the teeming landscape. Yet the afternoon did not pass without a somewhat significant incident.

A band of negroes appeared suddenly at a part of the road, carrying on their heads bundles of ripe sugar-canes to one of Mr. Bellingham's mills ; and as they passed, Vere saw his fair companion's face grow ashy pale, while, as if inspired by sudden terror, she clung to the horn of her saddle.

He instinctively followed the direction of her eye, and saw—he could have sworn it, though he remained silent on the subject—among the passing band one who was *not* a negro. He was a young man of colour, and his dark face, half hidden by the green bundle he bore, was that of Manuel Moreno !

If so—and that it was he Vere had not the shadow of a doubt—what object save jealous espionage and ultimate treason could bring that reckless and unscrupulous personage among his uncle's negroes, disguised as a labourer, and at such a time ?

The same thoughts occurred to Virginia Bellingham, yet neither she nor Vere adverted to the subject, as it was one which neither of them could precisely approach ; but the incident had the effect of curtailing their ride, as she suggested that they should turn their horses' heads homewards to the villa, where Quashy, the gigantic negro, was jangling the dinner-bell in the verandah.

The next day, and the next too, found Vere still lingering at Mango Garden, and becoming interested in negro politics and the process of making sugar and molasses, and the rise or fall in the prices of these wares. Somewhat sore at heart after his affair with Gertrude Templeton, he was far from in-

disposed to find a solace in the undoubtedly charming society of a beautiful Creole girl like Virginia Bellingham ; so he yielded to the course of events, and deemed it the wisest and most pleasant way of passing his time on that most dull and unprofitable of all duties, the command of an isolated detachment in a district new and strange to him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VIRGINIA BELLINGHAM.

WITH all his genuine hospitality and kindness of heart, the old gentleman was somewhat of a bore with his pride of family ; and Vere, with good-humour and politeness, had to undergo ever and anon a list of ancestry, with reference to a large framed and glazed family-tree (that beat any cabbage-tree 'all to nothing,' as his listener thought), and to certain hereditary features and traditional peculiarities that would have been intolerable to listen to, but that Virginia, the laughing Virginia, seemed to be the darling embodiment of them all in the fancy of the doting old man, in whose estimation Vere rose immensely when he mentioned that he believed he could point to tombs wherein lay his ancestors, the Earls of Oxford, who had their house and garden where now their bones lie—in the old and disused churchyard of St. Swithin the Confessor in the City of London. In Mr. Bellingham's eyes this at once placed Vere on the footing of a relative ; it sounded quite like a patent of nobility ; and Virginia listened to them both with her dark eyes full of mischief, while her pretty fingers unconsciously picked the marabout trimming from her fan, as she more than half suspected that their visitor was pandering to her father's fanciful pride.

We have said there was a species of languor over all the actions and bearing of Virginia Bellingham ; but these were naturally born of the climate she inhabited and the life she led like other Creole ladies.

She rose at an earlier hour than she had been wont to do

in London ; and in the most bewitching of dishabille—a dishabille in which she had the subtle art of making herself actually appear to be handsomer than she really was—she appeared at breakfast, after which, if not reading one of the last novels, she idled over fancy-work, or, since the advent of Vere, at her piano. Two hours before dinner were allotted to a ‘beauty sleep,’ or an elaborate toilette for dinner, after which the evening was devoted to music, gaiety, and dancing if guests or visitors dropped in. Thus do the girls of the Antilles pass their morning in inactivity, the day in dreaming, and the evening in pleasure. ‘This is the custom of the country,’ writes one who knows it well. ‘The system of education may be blamable, but the fair beings educated should not partake of the blame ; and even if the idleness of the lovely Creole were deserving of censure, yet there is so much to admire in her character, so much purity in her heart, so much affection in her spirit, so much gentleness in her manner, that it were impossible not to lose all memory of her faults in the pleasing contemplation of her many virtues.’

Vere, we have said, was his own commanding officer ; hence he had plenty of time at his disposal, and every hour he could spare from his detachment was spent at Mango Garden. With Mr. Bellingham and Virginia he rode or drove through the savannahs and vales, where the breeze from the sea came laden with the fragrance of a thousand fruits and flowers, and they explored together the whole country round the great estate, as far as the Guava Savannah, Manchioneel Head, and the Diver River.

Mr. Bellingham had eccentrically adopted Vere as a kind of kinsman—a friend certainly ; and with such a girl as Virginia it was only too easy, with all her alleged pride and hauteur, to glide into a brotherly and sisterly friendship, to draw back from which would have been prudish and ungracious, but the continuance of which was perilous work, in the voluptuous climate of the Antilles particularly.

Between them there sprang up a confidence that seemed like real friendship, if such could exist between two of opposite

sexes at their years, and both so personally attractive. If they thought it was only friendship they were foolish, as it requires deeper roots than their intimacy possessed ; but they had close and perilous confidences, telling such things as none but old friends tell to each other ; yet, amid all this, we doubt much if Vere ever ventured to whisper one word concerning Gertrude Templeton.

Hence, as day succeeded day, there seemed at last to be some foundation for that rumour which reached Gertrude on the fatal marriage morning, and which was, perhaps, the last thing that Vere wished should ever reach her.

Was he beginning to care for Virginia Bellingham ? But in this sense *care* is a word which a brilliant writer asserts to be the modest euphemism ‘in which a woman disguises the bold word *love*,’ and what reason had Vere now to care for any one else ?

He and she had gone on from point to point in a mixture of earnest and confidential jesting that was fast becoming perilous work between two whose eyes were so much disposed to seek, to dwell on, yes, and court each other’s gaze ; yet no word of aught that savoured of more than friendship, or open and pleasant intimacy, had escaped the lips of Vere while turning from time to time to that perfect and beautiful face, which was so rich in all its attractiveness, and which claimed, coaxed, and commanded admiration.

Withal—the ideas of mere friendship, platonism, and so forth—Vere found himself drifting—drifting into a very decided affair with Miss Bellingham ; and the little *dénouement* came about in the usual way.

‘How very odd it is!’ said the young lady one evening, after a pause in their conversation.

‘What is odd ?’ asked Vere, bending over the bright smiling face.

‘That some eight or nine days ago we knew not of each other’s existence, and now we have suddenly become quite intimate.’

‘Delightfully so.’

‘But you must not think that I am so candid, open—what shall I call it?—with every one as I am with *you*.’

‘I am enchanted to hear you say so.’

‘But then it is not as if you were one of ourselves. You are here only *en passant*, and will soon weary of Jamaica and the life we lead.’

‘But not of Mango Garden and all its charms, surely?’

‘Of Mango Garden and everything,’ replied Virginia, almost with petulance, as she slowly fanned herself.

‘Do not say so—it is impossible!’ said Vere, feeling alike the necessity and the impulse for saying something tender. ‘I shall never forget the hours of pure delight I have spent with you, Miss Bellingham.’

She cast down her long lashes, and light and shadow came alternately over her beautiful face, with every motion of her large feather fan, as she asked, with a low voice :

‘How often have you said as much—perhaps far more—to others?’

‘I could not do so.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I have never spent hours of delight with another,’ replied Vere, feeling that he could say so with truth, as those he had passed in the society of Gertrude were hours of tender anxiety rather than of unalloyed pleasure.

‘You mean me to believe this, and you are sure of what you say?’

‘Sure as that I live and am now addressing you,’ said he, taking her unresisting hand in his, while he could see that the heaving of her bosom increased with each respiration.

‘In all this you mean that you are actually making love to me?’ asked the girl, while something of quiet drollery mingled with coquettish delight in her sparkling eyes.

‘In all this I mean that I love you, Virginia!’ he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips.

‘Hush—don’t! here comes that odious Quashy!’

And Quashy it was, with a hideous grin on his sable visage, a grin that went literally from ear to ear, dividing his face as

it were in two, as he seemed quite to understand the situation, and with many apologies came to close and secure the jalousies for the evening ; and ere Vere could resume where he had left off, they were joined by Mr. Bellingham.

Vere was not a vain young fellow ; but had he been so, he could not fail to have been flattered in finding himself the escort and companion of a girl whose position, wealth, and beauty made her the acknowledged belle of the island, and to be moreover quite the *ami de la maison* at the residence of her father. Yet these ideas never occurred to him, though others did.

Among these was a doubt if he were acting honourably in permitting himself to drift into a passion for a girl whose family might have other views for her—a passion that he felt was born of idleness and opportunity quite as much as her wonderful attractions ; and to what end would an engagement be ? So pondered Vere. He could ponder in this instance, though he had given his whole soul to Gertrude. To what end ? he asked of himself again. He could not settle in the West Indies, and Mr. Bellingham could neither be expected to uproot his household nor part for ever with an only child on whom he doted.

Yet, with all this casuistry, he felt himself powerfully drawn towards Virginia, she was so winning and every way lovable. ‘ Good heavens ! ’ thought he ; ‘ to think that a photo and the offer of an umbrella should have led up to all this ! ’

To draw back in any way was impossible now, so Vere resolved to permit himself to drift with the tide—the whole situation was too seductive for resistance ; and side by side with her he sat at the piano, and though no more of love was said between them then, it was implied by their very silence, as hand touched hand in wandering over the keys together, and in the dusk she felt his breath stirring her hair, so closely were they seated, as he bent over her, and she sang to him.

Like poesy to the poet, music came to Virginia Bellingham as a gift direct from heaven. She was passionately fond of it, and at times she seemed to give her whole soul to it. To

Vere it proved indeed 'the food of love,' and hour after hour passed on this evening as he sat beside her, while she played the symphonies of Beethoven and the masses of Mozart, with, at times, a tender Irish melody between. More than once they engaged in a duet together, while papa Bellingham, weary after a long day's ride about his cane-brakes, was fast asleep in an easy-chair ; and when, in one instance, Vere's voice trembled audibly as it mingled with her own, she could little know that it was because he had sung the same duet with *another*, and at that moment was marvelling whether it were possible to love *two* women at once !

Amid all this the attention of Vere became roused by seeing palpably the dark outline of a man's figure distinctly traceable outside the jalousies of the verandah ; he could see also a face pressed close against them, and two eyes, amid the dusk, glaring in upon himself and Virginia—eyes that glittered like those of a cat or a rattlesnake !

He started to his feet, and then the eavesdropper vanished.

'What is it?' exclaimed Virginia, clasping his arm with both her hands.

'Fancy, perhaps. I thought some one was peeping through the venetian blinds.'

'For heaven's sake don't say so !'

But Vere was certain that it was *not* fancy ; and the suspicion occurred to him, as perhaps it did to Virginia, that the lurker was her dangerous cousin, Manuel Moreno.

Vere could feel that the girl was trembling violently ; he drew her tenderly close to him ; his arms went round her, and her face fell on his neck ; and thus in silence the great secret of both their hearts escaped them, and Vere retired to his room that night with a conviction of the necessity for addressing Mr. Bellingham on the subject ; an intense anxiety as to what the views of the old gentleman—easy-going though he was—might be ; and, more than all, a sense that the joy of being loved by a girl so beautiful and brilliant as Virginia was not without its shadow, and this shadow was her dangerous cousin.

That he was the lurker, inspired by jealousy, suspicion, and rage, Vere could scarcely doubt ; and he smiled scornfully at his own thoughts ; for he felt intense pique, annoyance, and degradation at the idea of such ignoble rivalry. In England he had been jealous of that tall oaf Derinzy ; but Moreno was a rival of a very different stamp—an outlawed man of colour and a reckless desperado, who had registered a terrible vow that he would shoot down like a dog any one coming between himself and his cousin ; one who was quite capable of keeping his word, and whom Vere knew to be lurking on the estate unknown to Mr. Bellingham.

‘Bah !’ thought Vere ; ‘if the worst comes to the worst, I don’t believe the fellow will dare to cross me !’

And then he thrust all thought of him aside, to dwell upon the soft image of Virginia and the joy of the past evening—that long and silent embrace so near her sleeping father’s chair ; and then came painful doubts of how the affair would end—doubts he would fain have shrunk from amid the flash of a new passion, but yet was compelled to face and sift.

This new love had filled up the vacuum—the craving for some one to love and be loved by—that Gertrude had left in his heart. Well, that object was so far attained, and with considerable celerity ; but Virginia’s father might have serious objections, and the morrow might see the door of Mango Garden closed on Vere for ever. If the old gentleman’s views were favourable, what might his stipulations be ? Could Vere consent to leave his regiment—the Eighth, to which he was so passionately attached—could he relinquish England, and settle for life in the West Indies ? With all his love for Virginia, these would be bitter pills to swallow. Though Mr. Bellingham always spoke of England as ‘home’ he had never been there, nor had any of his predecessors been since the days of the Cromwellian colonel ; and he had no more idea of going there than to the summit of the Andes ; so in this instance, prejudice on one hand and tender affection on the other might raise serious barriers on the part of her father, though ‘home is not any special house or piece

of ground in the universe ; it is only that spot or succession of stops where a man sits under the shadow of a vine he has planted, and gathers his household treasures around him. Home, thus, is everywhere on earth.'

But 'home' in the West, as in the East Indies, and in all our colonies, means Britain. The merchant receives his consignments from 'home;' the regiment is going 'home;' and usually all who go to these climes have ever a vague hope—have ever the desire—that on realising a competence they will go 'home'—a hope, in too many instances, fated never to be realised. But Mr. Bellingham never thought of England as 'home' in this sense. He only used the term by force of habit ; for his real home, like the graves of his family, lay under the shadow of the vast hills that look down on Morant Bay ; and Vere knew not what he had to hope for from the old West India planter.

The morrow was to produce much, more than Vere could quite anticipate ; and though it might be the last night he should ever sleep under the same roof with Virginia Bellingham, he slept eventually.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MANUEL MORENO.

FULL of her love, her new-born joy, and all the happy thoughts it suggested, Virginia Bellingham left her room betimes on the morrow and issued into the garden, where she could sit in a bower and watch the windows of Vere, on whose breast she had reclined last night ; and dreamily the girl rehearsed all that episode again and again.

Around her the garden, in its tropical beauty, was a veritable Eden ; yet flowers are seldom cultivated in the Antilles, as they flourish wild, but are splendid in their tints and wondrous in their beauty ; and the bower in which she sat was shaded by shaddock and custard-apple trees, about the stems of which twined the grape and the tendrils of the

melon, and on their branches could be seen from time to time the large and bright green lizard named the guana, which is harmless, beautiful, and, singular to say, fond of music ; and, fixing her eyes on one of these, the girl, in the happiness of her heart, began to sing to it in a low soft voice till a step on the gravel disturbed her. A fierce clutch was laid upon her arm, and two dark eyes, flaming with anger and evil passion, were bent upon hers, as she found herself face to face with her dreaded cousin, Manuel Moreno.

‘You here again!’ she exclaimed ; ‘how rash of you ! If papa sees you——’

‘What then ? and what care I who sees me now ? With all his alleged goodness of heart, I know that he is quite capable of forgetting the kinsman in the magistrate, and handing me over to the authorities ; but now, thank heaven, *their* tenure of office is a brief one.’

He breathed shortly and quickly as he spoke ; his dark eyes were literally aflame with suppressed rage, and the copper tint of his face, which came of his mixture of Spanish and Maroon blood, was pale even to ghastliness ; and altogether Manuel Moreno looked a very unpleasant and dangerous fellow.

‘If it is money you want, Manuel, I have none to give you,’ said Virginia, with reference to past occasions when she had more than once in secret replenished the exchequer of the outcast.

‘I do not want money, cousin,’ said he bitterly, yet sadly.

‘What then ?’

‘I came only to see you, but I have seen more than I expected. I have seen you and your popinjay Englishman—your buckra officer.’

‘Buckra ! Manuel, do not speak thus, like—like——’

‘Like what ?’ he asked fiercely.

‘Well, a negro.’

‘I am well-nigh one—a man of colour. Aha, my pretty cousin, it will be something to be that by and-by.’

‘When, Manuel ?’

‘When every white man’s throat in Jamaica is cut—sliced, like a ripe pumpkin.’

‘This officer of whom you speak is merely my father’s guest.’

‘And your lover !’

‘You have no right to say so.’

‘No right, perhaps ; but I have reason,’ he replied, eyeing her gloomily. ‘Curse him !’

‘Oh, why, Manuel ?’

‘Curse him again, I say, because you ask me why !’

Virginia looked at her furious kinsman imploringly. Her eyes were limpid, pure, and soft, ever changeful, with all their depth of colouring, but their tender expression only seemed to add fire to the young man’s fury ; yet he said quietly :

‘You know, Virginia, how deeply I love you, and that while I live you shall never become the wife of another.’

‘These words are vain and foolish,’ said she imploringly. ‘Begone, I implore you, lest my father find you here.’

She had then, however, a greater dread of Vere appearing, and she knew the desperate violence of which Manuel was perfectly capable.

‘Your father !’ said he scornfully ; ‘I shall teach him yet that I will have justice.’

‘Justice, Manuel ?’

‘Yes, I will have revenge ; and what is revenge but a wild kind of justice ?’

‘But revenge on whom ?’

‘On him—on the Englishman—on you, if I am crossed ; as God hears me, I will !’

Manuel scraped a vesta against a tree and lit a cigar, and the coolness of the proceeding, as contrasted with the utter ferocity of his tone and eyes, gave double point to his threats. But Virginia, with all her dread of him, became indignant.

‘Must I remind you, Manuel,’ said she, ‘that you are an outlaw, and that to be here is full of peril for you ?’

‘I know all that your father is capable of doing to me, his only sister’s son ; but among his negroes I am safe ; they know, value, and love me, if he and you do not.’

'Manuel, how cruel of you to talk thus !'

'Cruel ! Come, I like that,' said he, with a bitter laugh. 'You loved me once, Virginia.'

'I *never* loved you in the sense your words imply ; and how dare you say so, Manuel ?' she asked, while her eyes sparkled with indignation. 'As a cousin I tried to do so, all undeserving as you were and are, and I have certainly pitied you ; more I could not and cannot do.'

'I seek not even your pity, though I would lay down my life for your love. Last night I had a dream, Virginia. I held you in my arms, and yours were around me lovingly. I was about to kiss you when a man tore us asunder—that man by whose side you sat and sang last night. But even in my dream, Virginia, I had my revenge ; for, in fancy, I laid him dead at my feet,' added Manuel, in a low and concentrated voice, while his lips seemed to become parched, and his eyebrows were so contracted that they met together ; and Virginia, with all her knowledge of his character, became filled with anguish and alarm, but with something of honest indignation too.

'You love him, then ?' asked Manuel huskily.

'By what right do you ask ?' she demanded, as she rose to withdraw.

'The right of priority.'

'Fool !'

'The right of a kinsman, then.'

'That right you have forfeited.'

'How ?'

'By your ingratitude to papa, and the disgrace brought upon us by your bad actions.'

'Ere long, any way, I shall have the right of a protector,' said he, with a triumphant tone ; 'one who can save you and yours from a miserable death.'

'I know the meaning of your words, Manuel,' said Virginia sorrowfully ; 'they forbode your own destruction. For heaven's sake, I say, leave me and quit this place for ever !'

'You utterly forbid me to hope, then ?'

‘Yes—now and for ever.’

‘Enough !’

He hissed the word through his clenched teeth as he gave her arm a fierce clutch, and his eyes glared into hers ; then he uttered a terrible malediction, and quickly left her.

Virginia’s eyes were full of tears. She drew up the muslin sleeve of her morning dress, and saw that her snowy arm bore the dark livid marks of his iron fingers ; and these ominous marks were visible to the eyes of another, who now approached her—Vere, who had seen her parting with Manuel Moreno ; had seen him grasp and menace her, and who was perfectly conscious of her agitation ; and yet, inspired by a feeling that he could scarcely define, he ignored the whole affair, as he drew her arm caressingly within his own and kissed her on the cheek.

He could not trust himself to speak of Manuel Moreno to Virginia ; his utter disdain of such a rival was too strong within him—an outlaw, a horse-stealer, a felon, and a *débauché*, it was altogether too absurd to think of him ; yet, at that moment, he disliked the general air of Virginia, and her decidedly *distracte* aspect. He was in perfect ignorance of all that had passed, and he could only think, What power, if any, had this devilish cousin over her, and were women, as cynical Kyrle Desborough was wont to aver, ‘all alike’ ?

He had seen her bare arm after Manuel’s angry clutch, and even now he could see the marks left by his fingers on her tender skin beneath the thin and delicate muslin sleeve ; and Vere clenched his teeth as he thought, How dared the fellow to touch her thus ?

Terror lest Manuel should be lurking near, and that some unseemly *rencontre* might take place, made Virginia at once retire indoors with Vere, who in the delight of her presence soon forgot all about her troublesome kinsman.

His intentions of speaking at an early period to Mr. Bellingham on the subject of the favour or consent were frustrated for the time by his absence of the old gentleman, who, with his overseer, as Quashy informed him with a remarkable grin,

which Vere remembered at a future time, had gone to a distant part of the estate, where there was a species of riot among the negroes of a village; and thus left utterly alone with Virginia, the hours passed by of a day of delight that, for various reasons, he was never to forget, because of the events that followed it.

As Vere gazed fondly at her he thought what a creditable wife she would be even in London Society, or to parade under the critical eyes of Gertrude Templeton—for Gertrude was nothing now to him. Yet he instinctively shrank from the idea of such a parade; and as Virginia turned her eyes to his there was in them a light that was not the light of the tropical sun, but the light that God gives to the eyes of those who love and love truly—the light that, once seen, is never forgotten.

Nor did Vere forget that tender light when other days came—and these days were coming faster than he could anticipate.

Noon had passed; there was no appearance of Mr. Bellingham's return, and Vere was roused from his dream of pleasure by Quashy—the inevitable Quashy, who seemed to be most annoying, watchful, and ubiquitous—bringing him on a silver salver two letters, which he announced had just been 'brought by one buckra soldier from Morant Bay.'

The missives proved to be one from Kyrle Desborough and another from Toby Finch; so, while Virginia lingeringly left him to make her usual afternoon toilette, Vere opened the letter of his old friend first, and under all his present circumstances and surroundings, the contents provoked his laughter sometimes.

'How are you, old fellow—well and jolly, I hope? The old West Indian question, when asking after a friend's health, "Is that man dead yet?" is no longer in use now; but if not dead to the mess, to us, and to the world, you are something near it, by all accounts. What the deuce is all this we have heard from Toby Finch? And how long do you mean to leave your detachment to that deluded youth, who has gone

wild after some coloured girl? and how long do you mean to linger in those bowers of Armida called Mango Garden? "When you are ill-used by one woman there is great comfort in telling it to another, because, in nine times out of ten, the other always takes your side." Do you find it so with the bride of the Blue Mountains—the queen of sugar-cane and sugar-candy? This has been a mighty prosaic proceeding on your part. Toby tells us how you fell in with your divinity and won her eternal gratitude, not by rescuing her from a mad bull or a runaway steed at the verge of a terrific cliff, from Maroons or tigers, or anything else you chose, but by simply offering her the use, or the share rather, of an umbrella, just as you might have done to a little milliner in Oxford Street. I hear that she is lovely enough to put in peril a love that was true, that was freely and frankly returned, and not hedged round by the conventional selfishness of aristocratic snobbery.

'You know what I mean, old fellow. She may be wooed and won, whisper revenge and wounded self-esteem, especially if you still remember that frigid "cut" at Farnborough. Farnborough! How long ago it seems since that cool and delicious spring morning, when the Sebastopol bell clanged ten, and we marched from Aldershot to that wretched little railway station which is associated only with the arrival and departure of redcoats! But don't hook yourself in revenge, whatever you do, and rush from single blessedness into double wretchedness; but remember with Pope that

" "Woman is at best a contradiction still." "

('How cynical poor Kyrle is!' thought Vere; 'but then he knows not Virginia.')

'Stick to your Creole, old fellow, at least while the *affaire de cœur* lasts. Few of us have tenacity of character enough to adhere to one damsel, an absent one especially; and you remember Tommy Moore's advice—"When far from the lips of those that we love," etc. Though I say stick to your Creole for fun and to fill up the time, don't make a fool of yourself further. I promised more than one girl at Aldershot to bring

you safe home again ; and I hear that *la belle* Bellingham is the most capricious little beauty that ever broke a man's heart, and is just as much a creature to look beautiful and be admired—not loved—as any in the Lady's Mile at home. But now, all joking apart,' added Kyrle, 'a shindy is decidedly impending in Jamaica, and something seems at hand more exciting than a sham fight on the lines at Chatham or the Fox Hills at Aldershot.'

As a species of addendum to this, the missive of Toby Finch contained but two lines :

'Return *instantly*—a row on the *tapis* ; we are to be under arms all night !'

Delay after this intelligence was impossible, and Vere knew that, at all hazards, he must immediately repair to his post.

Virginia heard that he had received letters, and drew near him, her rapid and earnest glance bringing with it a quick and sweetly thrilling sense of their secret understanding.

'And you must leave me ?' she asked.

'Instantly, darling ; but for a little time only, I hope.'

He looked tenderly down on the little white face that was so lovingly upturned to his ; there was a brief embrace, a long and clinging kiss—a kiss that was not unseen, for Manuel Moreno and Quashy were both lurking near, in a thicket of shaddock trees ; and in another minute Vere was galloping, with all the speed one of Mr. Bellingham's best horses could exert, back to Morant Bay.

The unconcealed tenderness of the farewell and long gaze of Virginia after her departing lover, till a turn of the avenue shut him out from view, filled Manuel with rage and jealousy, while the negro rolled his great eyes hideously, for he too had his thoughts of a *white wife*.

'By golly, Massa Moreno, we must do for that buckra soldier !' he exclaimed ; 'cut um throat—pull out um gizzard—have um liver reeking hot—have um heart's blood ! Oh, lorry gorry, Massa Manuel !'

'Yes, Quashy, the time has come now when we shall make

an end of these cursed whites, and be free—free as air—free as the men of Hispaniola—lords of the soil we tread on !’ replied the other, in a low voice of concentrated passion. ‘Then you will stand by me to-night, Quashy ?’

‘To the death, Massa Manuel—to the death, by golly !’

Then the confederates—for such they were—shook hands with stern energy and separated.

That evening seemed a long, long one to Virginia, and she felt intensely lonely without Vere. He had become, as it were, a member of their little circle, and in the pleasant *abandon* of daily intercourse he had been taken into all the family plans and projects ; and while she dreamed and mused over the absence of her lover, she forgot that her father had not yet returned, and that his visit to the negro village was somewhat protracted.

On reaching Morant Bay, Vere found his detachment all quartered, for a time, in an empty granary, with forty rounds of ammunition per man in their pouches ; for ‘the row’ referred to by Toby Finch was supposed to be imminent, and it was necessary to have their party together and at the ready disposal of the local authorities.

A quarter-guard was detailed, a sentry posted at the granary gate, and the evening melted into night so tranquilly that Vere began to hope the alarm was a false one, and to speculate upon his return to Mango Garden.

The sun had long since sunk into the blue Caribbean Sea ; the atmosphere was cool and pure, yet inductive of languor ; the fireflies were flashing about, and the silver moon was rising above the jagged peaks of the Blue Mountains, when Vere, tired of Toby’s chatter, and, more than all of his persistent quizzing and chaff about Virginia Bellingham, went forth to muse on that young lady and enjoy a havannah, taking the precaution, however, to have his sword and revolver with him.

Humming a song in unison with the hour—a song Virginia had playfully sung to him more than once, and was old enough

and quaint enough to have been brought to Jamaica by Colonel Obadiah Bellingham of the Ironsides :

‘When the hollow drum has beat to bed,
And the little fifer hangs his head ;
When still and mute
Is the Moorish flute,
And watching guards nod wearily’—

‘By Jove, we are in for it at last !’ he suddenly exclaimed, as the clangour of drums, bells, cries, and conch-shells came suddenly upon the breeze, while flames began to redden the sky in various directions ; but to Vere’s eye they seemed chiefly in the direction of Mango Garden, a conviction that filled his soul with terror and apprehension, lest Mr. Bellingham’s most gloomy anticipations were about to be realised in terrible earnest.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GLANCE HOMEWARD.

NOTWITHSTANDING that startling cry which terrified all the household at Winklestoke, poor Rosamund had only fainted, and was brought round by the care of her maids and the old housekeeper ; and amid all his joy at her recovery Sir Ayling had one emotion of selfish satisfaction—that he had escaped the nine days’ wonder her death must have occasioned among that small section of mankind, the fashionable world of London.

For many days after her arrival at Winklestoke the girl was seriously ill, but in spirit rather than body.

Their marriage, with all its elaborations of ceremonial, had been accomplished. To the fullest extent Rosamund had indulged her sorrow and aversion ; but ere long the turbulence of both had begun to subside, though the conviction, the keen sense, that her life was cast away and would be a loveless and joyless one, pressed heavily on her heart, but more as a

still grief than an active one ; and there was one emotion, most useful perhaps towards cure, a conviction that stole sometimes upon her, that she had been without proper pride in permitting a secret attachment to overcome her fancy, and if this strengthened, the time might come when she might with apparent, if not real, tranquillity behold Kyrle Desborough the husband of another.

Another ! Married though she was, she recoiled from the thought of *that* as yet.

Her marriage was not the realisation of a young girl's dream of what such a tie should be. All those phrases, so stereotyped, yet so true, of a union of souls, of ideal love, of the communion of intellect and sympathy, elective affinities, and so forth, were thoroughly dead letters in her instance. The young, innocent, and eager soul was thrust back upon itself, and Rosamund yearned for another love than the querulous heart of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle could accord her.

She looked so young and charming, though ever sweetly feminine, that some who watched her almost hoped that a time might soon come—was that hope cruel, uncharitable, or wicked?—when a new life would be opened unto her ; but unfortunately for these speculators Sir Ayling seemed to grow more hale apparently day by day, to be 'quite frisky,' as Maud averred, and to have taken a new lease of existence.

Rosamund might have sought forgetfulness by plunging into the whirl of gaiety and such fashionable dissipation as London furnishes so readily for a wealthy, titled, and beautiful young matron ; but a sense of something closely akin to shame—shame for her marriage—repressed the poor girl for many months ; hence she shunned society instead of courting it, and recoiled upon herself.

Some one has written with considerable truth that a man's *real* courtship should begin upon his wedding-day, and it seemed to be so with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle. In his senile fashion he worshipped the shadow of Rosamund, and the very ground she trod on. Though querulous, having a decided temper of his own, and full of old bachelor habits,

he was never weary of smiling and gazing on her, of patting, petting, and caressing her, for she was verily the idol, the love, the beautiful toy of his old age ; but all this palled upon the girl, and it made her soul sick within her to know that she was, what she knew her own servants called her, 'an old man's dearie.' And she always felt herself like a ward with her old guardian, a daughter with her father, nay, a granddaughter, anything but a wife with her husband, whom sometimes she would in this spirit unconsciously offend.

'My dear Sir Ayling,' said she, when one day he had been petulant with her, 'what can I do to please you ?'

'Kiss me,' said he, as she stooped over his chair.

And she did so, but it was on the top of his *bald* head ; and this became a source of irritation by all it suggested.

Of the unquestionable magnificence and luxury of Winklestoke she had never taken heed. They were associated with too much of unhappiness and degradation in her mind, connected, as she deemed them, with the price for which her mother bartered her.

There was ever a solemn hush about the grand old house, a kind of repose, but no real joy. It was their honeymoon, and they would have no visitors for some weeks to come. She was sated with fine clothes and the family jewels, to which her husband and her friends had added more diamond crosses and hearts, brooches and bracelets, than she could wear in the longest lifetime.

She was certainly pleased with the carriages, which there had been no necessity for ordering anew, as Sir Ayling's 'turns out' had always been perfection ; but at one of Tattersall's crack sales he had got some beautiful horses for her especial benefit, while a whole suite of rooms in the most pleasant wing of Winklestoke had been furnished for her with luxury and splendour befitting a princess. Yet Rosamund felt as if she spent her girlhood in a dream, and that it was now too late, too desperate a thought or hope, ever to begin life over again. She could imagine no future, and nothing but passing the days in dull and dogged calmness if possible.

She thought she had got over her fancy for Kyrle Desborough, and had begun to think of him as we do of those who are dead and gone, as utterly beyond her reach ; and oh, how long, long ago it seemed since that night of passion and bewilderment in the conservatory ! The kiss and the abstraction of her glove—it was all a bagatelle to him, as we have shown, a mere bit of fun, *pour passer le temps* ; but Rosamund had never, never forgotten the episode ; for Kyrle's kiss was the first, last, and only one that had ever stirred her heart.

One day it chanced that her maid was assorting or clearing out some of Rosamund's wardrobes in her dressing-room, and in one of the drawers thereof she found a coloured photo of Kyrle Desborough in full uniform, with all his medals and the V.C. on his breast ; and Rosamund had some trouble in concealing from the inquiring eyes of her abigail the emotion this discovery excited within her.

She thrust it back, closed the drawer, and sighed bitterly. Anon, when alone, she drew forth the miniature, which brought before her to the life Kyrle's dark and handsome face, with his bright peculiar smile, and she gazed at it with an expression of eyes that might have puzzled Sir Ayling, and certainly would not have met with his approval.

Then something like an emotion of guilt came over her, and she felt her pale face flush scarlet. She thought of Robin Gray, and the words :

' I daurna think o' Jamie, for that would be a sin ;'

and kissing the senseless card, put it gently in the fire, and watched the flames consume it.

Never more would she trust herself to look upon that handsome face again, with such emotions at least. Subsequent events, by a species of distempered fancy perhaps, had made this dead love a dearer and treasured thought to the girl ; but the tears she often shed over it in secret were seen by heaven alone, and when yielding to such thoughts she would deem herself both weak and wicked,

‘To him I could be nothing now, even if we met,’ she would ponder ; ‘but was I ever anything ? We could but meet as strangers who had never known each other ; and, thank heaven, there is but a slender chance of our ever meeting at all. Yet how dear he was to me in secret !—how dear he can never know.’

‘Are you quite happy, darling ?’ her mother asked her, with a hypocrisy that kindled the ire of the girl.

‘Of course I am, mamma,’ she replied ; ‘I have the most splendid jewels, the most brilliant toilette in London, and I go to the drawing-room next week. What more could I desire ?’

But the smile of Rosamund was a ghastly one. Would the soft tints of the sweet wild rose ever come back to her cheek, or the heart-born laugh arise on her lips again ?

Sir Ayling could perceive that her spirits drooped more than her outward system ; she seemed more melancholy and full of thought when she deemed herself unnoticed, and often smiled when she was saddest, and every way affected to appear otherwise than she really was—miserable.

But she was not entirely without food for other thoughts. The mysterious woman who had been present at her marriage and whose face and glance seemed to exercise a curious effect upon her husband, had been seen by her more than once in the vicinity of Winklestoke when no one seemed to know anything about it ; and once, when driving in her pony phaeton through the park, she was almost certain that she had seen Sir Ayling part—and with some *empressement*, though in great haste—from her at a wicket in a thick holly hedge, beyond the screen of which Rosamund could see him, if he it was, no further.

Rosamund was conscious too, as the woman passed her, of detecting in her face a strange, sardonic, and bitter smile, the source of which was a puzzle or a problem the weary spirit of the girl disdained to solve by making the slightest inquiry.

But a time was in the future—a time remote then—when

an event was to occur and a meeting to take place that was destined to exercise a terrible and evil influence on the lonely reveries, the sad thoughtful hours of the girl-wife—hours spent in solemn dreariness of summer and autumnal twilight.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BLACK INSURRECTION.

THE crisis had come. The revolt of the negroes, under Bogle, Moreno, and others—the revolt of which none could precisely see the end—had taken place !

On the evening we left Vere getting his small party under arms in hot haste, vast armed mobs, intent on vengeance, they scarcely knew for what, were approaching Morant Bay.

It would seem that, on a preceding day, a negro, said to be from Mango Garden, was brought up for trial before the justices, accused of certain crimes and misdemeanours ; but ere the proceedings closed, a numerous band of black peasantry, from the neighbouring estates, led by Quashy, Mr. Bellingham's giant negro, preceded by a band of music, and all armed with bludgeons or other weapons, surrounded the Court-house, and publicly avowed their determination to rescue the prisoner if he was convicted.

By order of Baron Ketelhardt, an attempt was made to seize Quashy and others who were prominent ; but that sable personage—strong in the belief that, by means of an Obeah, he possessed some magic superiority, which alike protected him against wounds and the danger of being taken prisoner by any white man—burst into the Court-house at the head of his wild rabble, all inflamed with new rum, as maddening in its effect, at times, as the hempseed or *bhang* of the Hindoos, and rescued the culprit.

A solitary constable boldly offered resistance, but was appalled by the aspect of Quashy, now stripped to the waist, and wearing only a pair of short red and white striped cotton trousers, fastened by a belt which held a knife and a pair of

old brass butted pistols. Towering above all his compeers, in the red glow of the setting sun that shone through a window of the hall, his herculean form had something in its muscular rigidity and activity, of a demoniacal aspect, as with one hand he tore the black felon out of the dock, and by the other stretched the luckless constable at his feet, accompanying each rapid act with a yell like the roar of a wild animal.

To seize him by numbers was impossible then; the conviction that he was impervious to lead or steel imbued him with a mad and blind confidence that rendered him fearless; and any negro, who might have been disposed to law and order, had too wholesome a fear of his Obeah, his power and vengeance, to attempt obstruction or remonstrance; so Quashy bore off his man in triumph, accompanied by Manuel Moreno, for whose apprehension, on other charges, warrants had long been out.

No further riot than this rescue from justice appears to have ensued at that time; and, singular to say, the magistrates thought so little of the occurrence—startling though it was—that they took no immediate steps to communicate with the executive government.

Shortly after warrants were issued for the capture of some thirty of those most prominent in this outrage; but the strange wild notes of the conch-shell were heard in all quarters, among the plantations, in the woods, the cane-brakes, and the villages; and the negroes gathered in bands—in many instances under their long since and secretly chosen captains—of fifty, but armed now with pikes, cutlasses, muskets, and bayonets, and put all authority at defiance in and about Morant Bay.

On receiving tidings of this revolt from the custos, Baron Ketelhodt, the Governor of Jamaica, lost not a moment in getting succour from the general commanding at Kingston, and a strong detachment, to reinforce Vere and keep order, was instantly detailed from the garrison; while Kyrle Desborough with all speed was sent to Captain de Horsey, the senior naval officer at Port Royal, to request that a man-of-

war should take the troops without delay round by the Palisades and Yallas Bay to their destination. That officer lost no time in getting his ship ready for sea. She was the *Wolverine*, of twenty-one guns and 400 horse-power. In eight hours from the time the tidings of a revolt reached Kingston, the required troops were on their way ; but meanwhile affairs had come to a crisis at Morant Bay, and a terrible massacre of English people had taken place.

On the evening in question, when Vere had come in haste from Mango Garden, so confidently was an outbreak anticipated that every planter and white man had repaired to Morant Bay, with the best arms they could collect—swords, revolvers, and double-barrelled rifles ; but instead of taking these means of defence with them into the Court-house—their general rendezvous—they foolishly left them at hotels or in the houses of friends in the town ; while to the volunteers, who had been ordered out by Baron Ketelhodt, only ten rounds of ammunition per man were served out.

The meeting to consult on the state of affairs took place, and then it was noticed by the baron and others that the black landed proprietor, Mr. G. W. Gordon, whose name became so fatally conspicuous, whose duty it was to be present, and who was always conspicuously so, was now *absent*.

So numerous and well armed were the negro bands, so incessant were the blowing of conch-shells and the ready responses to them from all quarters, so ominous was the bearing and so open the threats of the entire coloured population, that Captain Hitchins, who commanded the volunteers, objected to a man of them leaving his post even for a moment to procure refreshments ; and he barely had them formed upon their regular place of parade when a messenger came galloping up.

‘They are coming—they are coming from the plantations everywhere !’ cried this personage ; ‘they are coming in thousands, and will be upon you !’

But ere the volunteers, after being joined by Vere’s little party, were drawn up in front of the Court-house, the rebels

had routed the armed police, sacked the station, and appropriated every musket and cartridge in the place.

In front of the seat of authority a vast mass of maddened negroes, excited by rum, the hope of licence of every kind, in which murder and robbery were but minor elements, surged and seethed and yelled to and fro, their yellow eyeballs shining with a species of infernal joy, their white teeth glistening like those of sharks, their whole gestures and aspects—their very antics—savouring of something diabolical and infinitely dangerous, as they were all well, though variously, armed with muskets and fixed bayonets, cutlasses, fish-spears, long poles with billhooks attached to them, or stones or bottles; and, led by a powerful negro with a pistol in each hand, they advanced in an unwieldy mob across the courtyard, accompanied by a truly infernal discordance of horns, conches, drums, yells, and shouts; while, scared and terrified, those of the white population whose windows overlooked the scene, and who all knew their able defenders were few, gazed with blanched faces and fearful hearts upon the catastrophe that rapidly ensued.

Vere looked everywhere, even with his field-glass, among the seething mass in front; but was unable, in the mingled light of the stars and torches, to discover either Manuel Moreno or his *fidus Achatas* Quashy, and his heart sank within him with the very natural dread that they were at the work of outrage *elsewhere*.

Unarmed, as they nearly all foolishly were, by their own unpardonable oversight, the white gentleman rushed from within to man the Court-house door, while Baron Ketelhodt, with a loud voice, besought all to keep the peace.

‘By golly, we want no peace!’ was the united shout of all; and to evince this, showers of missiles were poured among the troops, and three volunteers—Captain Hitchins, Sergeant McGowan, and Ross, a private—fell severely wounded, the latter mortally, as an eye was scooped out of his head, and he died soon after.

Waving a white handkerchief to show that he wanted

peace, the baron, amid a shower of missiles hurled by cowardly and savage hands, continued to read the Riot Act, prior to which ceremony the troops could not fire ; and while this form, of which the negroes were ignorant, was in process, Vere felt his blood at fever-heat, as the words of the baron were met by senseless shouts of derision, and, closing in upon the volunteers, the negroes, while uttering most diabolical threats, struck up their weapons and proceeded to hurl stones, bottles, and brick-bats through the windows of the Court-house ; so the clash of glass and frames mingled now with the terrible medley of sound on every hand.

At last the Riot Act was read ; then Vere gave the order for his little party to wheel up *en potence* on the flank of the volunteers, and thus a cross fire of fifty yards, without sighting the rifles, was poured upon the rebels, who fell over each other in shrieking heaps. But the rest, on suddenly being joined by 500 well-armed negroes from another point, undeterred by the deaths or wounds of their comrades, made a simultaneous rush upon the troops, and completely overpowered the small body of volunteers (at whom their hate and vengeance seemed chiefly directed), and separating them from Vere's party, compelled them to retreat in one direction ; while he, keeping the blacks in check with the bayonet, fell back a little way, and was finally compelled, by the pressure of numbers, to retire towards the granary, as the volunteers had fled into the Court-house, from the shattered windows of which they fired briskly, while their wretched ten rounds per man lasted, on the wild hordes of infuriated rebels who surged around the building—infruriated all the more that they had drawn and tasted blood, and become excited by the genuine negro lust of carnage and cruelty.

Tired of firing back at the Court-house windows, even after the volunteers and the helpless creatures within had expended their ammunition, the rebels determined to change their tactics. A strong west wind was blowing from the hills that look down on the Morant river, and of this they resolved to avail themselves, and set fire to the edifice (which was con-

structed of the most inflammable material) on its western side. More than once they had failed to force a passage into the building, against the door of which they had been led by the unknown negro referred to, in rear of whom the sable rabble spread out fanwise, or, if we may be pardoned the pedantic simile, like the Roman triangle at the battle of Ecnomus or the double phalanx of Epaminondas, though the mass of its component parts bore personally, in attire, a pretty close resemblance to the grotesque and would-be dandy nigger minstrels of Whitechapel and Mile End, with the genuine plantation nigger bare to the waist and below the knee, but in heart and spirit like to incarnate demons.

Torches were now brought in numbers, and in their glare the frightful horde of negroes could be distinctly seen, armed with muskets and bayonets, billhooks and pikes, all yelling, and in some instances pitchforks seemed to form devilish horns to the dark faces. One leader harangued them vehemently ; but none listened to him, as all were intent on whetting each other's spirit of vengeance by singing the famous negro song of Jamaica :

‘ Massa, me no dead yet—carry um along !’

According to local tradition, about the beginning of the present century, the father of Mr. Bellingham, when any of his slaves became old or useless, was in the habit of having them borne to a certain rocky hollow on his estate, and left there to be devoured by kites or wild animals, before life had departed, to the end, it was alleged, that he might be saved the cost of their maintenance. But it chanced on one occasion that a poor wretch—the father of Quashy—who was being thus disposed of, had strength left to say, ‘ Me no dead yet, massa,’ and implored pity. ‘ Carry him along,’ was the stern response ; so Quashy the elder was left in the hollow, stripped, to his fate, which he contrived to escape by crawling out and reaching Kingston, where, many months after, he was met by his former master, who, though astonished, had still presence of mind to claim the ‘ dead alive,’ who afterwards

lived to a great old age, under the care and protection of Virginia's father, a planter of a very different stamp and character. But the episode, brief as it is, gives us a forcible idea of the slave system as it once existed in the Antilles ; and now the song made upon it, chorused by thousands of hoarse, guttural and unmusical voices, rolled out like thunder on the night, accompanied by the twangle of banjos and blowing of conch-shells, while fire was being applied, as we have said, on the windward side of the large wooden Court-house, and bodies of the rebels formed a close cordon around it, to slaughter all who might attempt to escape.

Among those within it were the Baron von Ketelhodt and his son, many magistrates, Captain Hitchins and the survivors of his volunteer force, with several other gentlemen, including the rector of Morant Bay and his three sons.

In a few minutes the edifice was a mass of flames, and the molten lead from the roof began to run through certain openings upon the unfortunate creatures below, many of whom were helpless and streaming with blood from gun-shot wounds ; and so inflammable were the materials of the building, that it was evident the impending descent of the roof would cause the destruction of all.

It was determined to make a rush and attempt to break through, though shots were now flying in all directions, and those who fell under them were fortunate in escaping a more terrible death.

A few found temporary shelter in an adjacent edifice ; but it too was fired, and all were driven forth by the flames to a terrible fate at the hands of the negroes ; for then commenced, we are told, ' those fearful and bloody acts, which were only paralleled by the massacre at Cawnpore.' The cries for mercy, the savage yells of the women hounding on the men, as each new victim was discovered, and the heavy thuds of the cutlasses on the bodies of the butchered, were heard above the rattle of the musketry (for Vere's men had opened fire again) and the hissing of the devouring flames. The Baron von Ketelhodt, the Rev. Mr. Hershel, and Lieutenant Hall were beaten to death with

sticks. Captain Hitchins, faint with the loss of blood, owing to his numerous wounds, and utterly unable to resist, was slowly hacked to death by a negro with a cutlass, who sat down to his diabolical work as coolly as if he had been chopping wood. The Rev. Mr. Hershel's tongue was cut out, and the fingers of Baron Ketelhodt were severed from his hands.

Save two, who were left for dead, with frightful wounds, the entire volunteer force perished, and with them nearly all the principal inhabitants of the district. In some instances the brains were scooped out of the heads of the victims, mixed with rum, and drunk amid shrieks and yells of savage exultation.

All unforeseeing such a terrible catastrophe as this, so perished these unfortunate creatures, at the very time when their wives and families were awaiting their return to their snug and pleasant villas embowered among groves of orange, shaddock, and lemon trees.

Maddened by all these awful proceedings, and the desolation that seemed coming over the once flourishing town of Morant Bay, Vere felt inclined to rush on and seek dire vengeance with the bayonet ; and had he proposed it, every one with him, from Toby Finch to his drum-boy, would have followed him. But a moment's reflection showed him that he, and every one there, would have perished amid that armed horde, without effecting anything ; for though a brave fellow, Vere was not rash. 'The true hero,' it has been justly said, 'is not he who cannot realise death, and who dashes on the enemy's guns, confident that they will not harm him ; but rather the man who, having calculated the possibilities, and feeling that death is most probably in store for him, nevertheless girds up his loins with the courage, not of unconsciousness, but of determination, and prepares him for the fight.'

Midnight saw the horrible massacre end, when the negroes, intoxicated with rum, excitement, and the lust of bloodshed, hurried off in small parties to attack the isolated plantations, and carry the spirit of insurrection throughout the island. At this crisis it was deemed a special interposition of Provi-

dence that the Maroons, so formidable from their number and character, and whose loyalty was so doubtful in consequence of their recent rebellion, which took more than a year to suppress, and with whom it was well known the rebel leaders had been secretly tampering, happily decided on casting their fortunes with those of the white people. They protected Bath, a town in the eastern part of the island, and like its English namesake famous for hot springs ; they captured Paul Bogle, the real leader of the Morant Bay rebels, and many other ringleaders ; and by their general conduct evinced the value of their military services, and the danger they would have proved as foemen ; for they are the 'Children of the Mist' of Jamaica romance, and have their haunted Nancy Town among the mountains, the mysteries of which no white man has ever succeeded in unravelling or describing.

The hours passed slowly on, and Vere's men could neither lie down nor relinquish their arms, as they knew not the moment they might be attacked from some quarter ; and ere long, over the smoking ruins of the Court-house, with all its ghastly piles of black and white corpses, the glorious West Indian dawn came in. The valleys with all their luxuriant groves were still veiled in purple shadow, while the peaks of the Blue Mountains seemed tipped with crimson fire, and the waves around the distant promontory were rolling in golden light, and the insects, chiefly butterflies, were rising in clouds from the rich herbage and grass, wherever one's foot fell ; and all Nature seemed jewelled and enshrined in glorious sunshine. But the heart of Vere was oppressed with the bitterest anxiety, and full of a dread that he cared not to impart to Toby Finch, who more than once asked him bluntly :

'What the devil are we to do now ?'

It was a pertinent question, for there was no appearance of the *Wolverine* with the troops, and they had no one to receive immediate orders from, as all the persons in authority were lying dead in or around the ruins of the Court-house.

During these doubts, a man of colour was stopped by Vere's sentinel as he attempted to pass his post.

‘I have a note for your officer,’ said the stranger, who seemed weary, worn, and in the highest excitement.

‘A note for me?’ said Vere, who heard him speak; ‘from whom?’

‘The overseer at Mango Garden.’

Vere tore it open, and found it contained but two lines:

‘Help us, for God’s sake. Mr. Bellingham has been brutally murdered, and his daughter carried off!’

This brief notice of events so terrible made Vere’s blood run cold. Virginia carried off—by whom? The bearer could not, or perhaps would not afford him the least information on the subject.

Might it not be all some dreadful mistake? But that was impossible; the note was proof of some dire calamity having happened, and its words seemed written in letters of fire before him.

The non-appearance of Manuel Moreno, and of Quashy too, among the insurgents, was quite accounted for now; and in horror Vere remembered the circumstance of the former lurking in disguise on the estate, and the blasphemous vow he had in writing called upon heaven to register.

For a moment the soul of Vere died within him, and in terror for Virginia his very heart seemed to fill with tears. Carried off, and by murderous hands! carried off, and at such a time, when her very race and colour marked her as a helpless victim! Now, how he repented all his selfish casuistry, and thought that all the world would be well lost for the love of Virginia Bellingham!

Instant action afforded him some relief, and with his party, all in light marching order, having left their knapsacks behind them, he quitted the now desolate and blood-stained town of Morant Bay, and moving at a quick pace, struck at once into the well-known path that led to Mango Garden.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE WILD CANE-BRAKE.

IN the evening, after Vere left her, the hours passed slowly and anxiously with Virginia, whom the protracted and unaccountable absence of her father began to alarm ; and seated alone, in the twilight, she ceased to idle over the keys of her piano, and listened to every passing sound, expectant of his horse's hoofs in the avenue, or his well-known step in the verandah without. Quashy also was absent, none knew where ; so the wax-lights were brought in by another negro, to whose care she consigned her household pet—a tiny negro boy, whose glossy skin was of the most sable tint ; for frequently in the West Indies the mistress of an establishment, in addition to her birds or spaniel, pets a little black or coloured child, who ultimately grows up to be useless to herself or any one else ; but Virginia's pet, in this instance, was an orphan born on the plantation.

Suddenly she heard a step in the verandah ; it was lighter than her father's, but she sprang forward and opened the jalousie, to be confronted by—Manuel Moreno ! His cheek was flushed with a rich colour, that showed distinctly under his clear copper-tinted skin ; and his dark beady eyes were sparkling with excitement or recent exercise, she knew not which. But what chiefly attracted the attention of Virginia was the circumstance that he had a waistbelt, in which were stuck a cutlass and revolver, and that he carried a double-barrelled gun in his hands.

'You here, Manuel—you ?' she exclaimed, in dread now lest her father might arrive.

'Yes, I, cousin.'

'But *here?*' she persisted.

'Why not ?' he asked angrily.

'What rashness—in my father's house ?'

'Where should I be but in the house of him whose heir

I hope one day to be?' he asked mockingly, with a sneer of malice in his eyes.

'Manuel, why do you come thus, and armed too?'

'Because, my dear cousin the time has come for the free men of Jamaica to wear and use such tools as these. The blacks have revolted; the whole island is up; the whites are doomed, and I alone can protect and save you. Come with me instantly, ere it is too late.'

Virginia, naturally pale, now grew pallid, but still regarded him incredulously. She was aware of the rumours and perils of the time, thus her first thought was of her absent father.

'Come with me—come!' he repeated, attempting to take her hand; but she shrank from him, and placed it behind her.

'Is there danger abroad?'

'Danger!' said he, laughing; 'there is war—bloodshed and massacre on every hand; and ere long the rioters will be here.'

'Where's papa? I cannot go without papa,' said the girl piteously and in growing terror; for the tone and bearing of her cousin carried conviction with them at last.

'Your "papa" is safe enough by this time,' replied Moreno, with a fierce but unfathomable smile. 'Come with me, I say; another minute and it may be too late!'

'Where?'

'Anywhere; but here you cannot remain to fall the victim to the first negro who finds you. All on the estate are in arms, and will doubtless sack the house; and you know what negroes are when they are maddened by rum and frenzy. Listen, do you hear that?'

Manuel dashed open one of the jalousies, and Virginia could hear the sound of a negro chorus, rising and falling on the soft night wind. Sometimes it seemed to die away, as if the singers had descended into a hollow, and then it swelled out loudly, as if given by hundreds of voices, and the chant was the ominous one:

'Massa, me no dead yet—carry um along!'

Manuel knew, though she did not, that the singers were bearing with them the horribly mutilated body of her father, for the express purpose of terrifying her and torturing her mentally, before perhaps they destroyed her. And those people were wretches to whom the good old planter had been, during his long lifetime, a generous employer, a benefactor, and a father. Nearer and nearer they came, and shouts and howls began to mingle with their chant; then the glare of torches was seen among the trees, from which the parrots were scared in flights.

‘They are passing the house, I think,’ said the pale girl, now glancing imploringly at her kinsman, who at all times inspired her with terror, even when she had pitied him and, unknown to her father, relieved his wants.

‘They are *not* passing the house,’ said he, now taking in his her passive hand.

‘Papa not here—not here yet! Oh, how *can* I go with you, Manuel, and alone? Already my eyes are red, and my hair is all anyhow,’ she added, glancing at herself in a mirror.

‘Red—why are they so?’ asked Manuel, with a jealous gleam in his eyes; ‘and as for your hair, I don’t think it will be noticed much in the forest or cane-brake, where we shall have to hide till I can place you somewhere in safety—as my wife.’

Virginia did not hear the last word, as Manuel was busy extinguishing the wax-candles; and, throwing over her a long dark poncho wrapper to conceal her white muslin dress, he led her out of the house by a private door, of which he was perfectly cognisant; while the rabble, who bore her unfortunate father’s body in a blanket, debouched from the avenue before the principal entrance, where they were joined by all the black servants of the establishment, male and female; and a scene of riot, devastation, disorder, and the wildest orgies ensued; but, being aware that Moreno was one of themselves, and regarded Mango Garden as his own property, they did not, as in so many other instances, destroy the house by fire.

To do him justice, in the first flush of their fury he feared them for his beautiful cousin, and he was anxious to protect her for his own sake. He knew well that to destroy the white women and girls formed no part distinctly of the revolvers' general plan, as they were to be preserved as wives for the victorious negroes ; but Manuel Moreno feared justly that he might have many sable rivals in the first fury of the outbreak he, Bogle, and Gordon had so successfully, as yet, brought about ; and he was not without a very distinct dread, in particular, of Quashy, from certain remarks that personage, now a captain of fifty negroes, had let fall with reference to his beautiful mistress ; and of this brother patriot he resolved to rid himself by a bullet on the first convenient opportunity.

While hurrying along by his side, and finding the shouts and general uproar at Mango Garden were waxing faint, as the distance increased between her and that place, it seemed to Virginia—accustomed as she had ever been to ease, security, wealth, and luxury—altogether intolerable and incredible that she, her father's daughter, should be flying like a fugitive—and a penniless fugitive too—from her own house in the night ; but she yielded to the energy of Moreno ; and to the terror of the time was now added a double dread for the safety of her father and that of Vere, whose very presence in Jamaica had come to pass through the anticipation of what had now occurred—that terrible revolt of the blacks ; a revolt all the more dreaded by the whites, whose minds were full of the great East Indian Mutiny of eight years before.

With all her West Indian languor and softness, Virginia Bellingham was meant by nature to be neither a saint nor a martyr. She had both mettle and capacity to face much when thoroughly roused—the mettle of old Colonel Obadiah, her father would have said ; for she possessed a power of will and an energetic activity that few would have expected. And it was fortunate for her that she did so, when flying by night, through secret paths, known better to Moreno than to herself, into the heart of a wild cane-brake, where nothing was heard but the buzz of insect life, and where the tall

slender shafts that towered skyward, and spread out like a reedy sea for miles on every hand, shut out the red glare of the incendiary fires that were shooting up on the Blue Mountain estate, and other plantations where the negro peasantry had risen on their masters.

‘Surely we are safe now, Manuel? I can go no further,’ said Virginia faintly.

‘Be seated then, cousin,’ said he, indicating the root of a gigantic cane, where she threw herself wearily down, and covering her face with her hands, began to moan and weep for her father. He was old, unarmed, single-handed, and helpless, and altogether so unlike Vere, who was young, strong, able, and surrounded by stout and well-trained European comrades. She was completely crushed in spirit; her pride of bearing was gone, bowed down by calamity and peril. But feeling that she was completely at his mercy, Moreno viewed her with a species of gloomy complacency, yet without an atom of pity or compunction; though well aware that her father, save himself the only kinsman she had on earth, was at that moment lying dead, a cruelly murdered man, under the roof of his own hospitable dwelling, the victim of those who had been employed by him for years, and for those years had been fed by his bounty.

Roused perhaps by the presence of the solitary pair in that wild cane-brake, there issued a singular humming noise, chirping and croaking, on the earth around and in the air above them, among the spreading tufts of the lofty canes; large beetles went banging about, making a sound like a humming-top; bats flitted to and fro; while fireflies flashed about like red sparks; and there came at times the croak of the tree-toad, an inoffensive reptile, about six inches long, from a neighbouring pool: all of which would have proved a source of much disgust and many terrors to any other European girl save a Creole; thus Virginia was heedless of them.

Encouraged by the isolation of their position, and feeling the necessity as well as the desire to say something to alleviate her growing dismay, Manuel placed his rifle against a

cane, and kneeling beside the shrinking girl, endeavoured to console her ; but with all the slimy suavity he possessed, in virtue of his coloured blood and half-Maroon father, he was not successful in his efforts, and only blundered and succeeded in rousing anger with her fear.

‘As your cousin, you know that I have a right to protect you,’ said he, placing a hand upon her shoulder ; ‘and protect you I will from the whole world, and more.’

‘More?’

‘Yes—from yourself.’

‘Myself?’

‘Yes, dear cousin, dearest Virginia!’

‘Will you please to explain without these absurd expressions of endearment, which, if they were unwelcome to me when under my father’s roof, must prove still more so here in this place, and circumstanced as I am now.’

‘I mean, then,’ said he, eyeing her almost malevolently, and certainly gloomily, ‘that I shall prevent you from becoming the victim of either black or white.’

‘Against the latter I need no protector, Manuel.’

‘Shall I speak more plainly?’

‘If you please, Manuel.’

‘Then I shall prevent you from becoming the victim or the wife, which you will, of that buckra officer who dared to take my place at Mango Garden.’

‘Buckra again ; how like a negro you *will* talk, cousin!’

‘Sneer as you may——’ he began furiously.

‘I do not sneer at you, but I pity you, Manuel,’ replied Virginia gently, and fearful of rousing him in such a place.

‘I do not seek your pity, Virginia.’

‘What then?’

‘Your love,’ said he, in a low and agitated voice, as he bent closely over her.

‘Is this the place, I say again, to talk in such a strain to me?’

‘Pardon me, cousin ; I know how weak and foolish girls can be ; and you, Virginia—you——’

‘Say on ; well, what of me ?’ she asked impatiently.

‘You are angry with me.’

‘Nay, Manuel, I am not ; there is my hand.’

He took its soft white fingers in his caressingly, and said very gently :

‘I was about to say simply this : that overborne, carried away—how shall I phrase it?—by this Englishman Vere, you may, under the influence of five minutes of folly and weakness, have said “yes” to a proposal involving the whole of your future life.’

‘And if I did,’ said the girl impetuously, ‘what then ?’

‘The more potent reason that I, your cousin, Manuel Moreno, should save you from him and from yourself,’ he replied firmly, almost sternly.

With her large soft eyes slightly dilated, Virginia looked upward at the speaker, and while longing for day—as mid-night was long since past—she said gravely, yet gently :

‘Let there be no more of this, Manuel ; it wearies, it worries, and pains me. I know, of course, the drift of it all, for we have gone over the same dreary ground before. You wish me to marry you ; to be your wife, Manuel.’

‘Oh, Virginia !’

‘Why, Cousin Manuel, there is an expression in your face too often, and it is there now, that might, nay, would, make any woman, who was less than a devil, afraid to marry you.’

‘In-deed !’ said he syllabbling the word, and now eyeing her almost savagely, as he clutched her delicate shoulder with his strong hand.

‘Begone, Manuel Moreno !’ she exclaimed, now gathering courage and starting to her feet, with her dark eyes aflame, as she writhed herself haughtily free of his bold grasp.

‘And leave you here alone—alone in this wild cane-brake—and at such a time ?’

‘Yes ; begone, I say. Papa must and shall take legal means to protect me from such intrusions and outrages as yours.’

‘Legal means ?’

‘You understand me ; yes.’

'By putting warrants in force, I suppose,' said Moreno, laughing genuinely at the idea.

'How, matters nothing to me.'

'Well, your precious papa will cross my path in this world no more.'

At these words a deadly fear seized her.

'Oh, Manuel, what am I to infer?' wailed the poor girl piteously.

'Just what my words imply.'

'Have you—have you,' she asked, with a terrible effort, while leaning against a tall swaying cane, and pressing a hand upon her heart—'have you dared to raise your hand against him?'

'No ; though little daring there would be about it.'

'Villain, villain !' exclaimed Virginia, as a terrible light began to dawn upon her ; 'did you forget he was your own kinsman ?'

'Kinsman ! he disdained to claim me as such. But even had I claimed him, that would not have saved him from his fate, or having the contents of his shattered head mixed with brimming bumpers of rum. Now, my pretty cousin, you know all.'

Virginia scarcely heard the closing words of his detestably brutal speech. She reeled wildly round, made a clutch at some fancied support, and fell on the ground in a breathless faint.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN HIDING STILL.

As he gazed upon the helpless creature, now so completely in his power, now so utterly at his mercy, passion, not love—for love is ever pitiful—stirred to furnace heat the heart of Manuel Moreno. With this sensation were singularly mingled those of revenge, jealousy, and avarice—revenge on his kinsman, her father, who had so justly made an outcast of him ;

jealousy and hate of Vere ; and avarice, in the desire to be lord and master of his uncle's estate and wealth, in right of propinquity and blood, and, more than all, as the husband of his daughter and heiress.

But were this lifeless-like faint no faint, but death, all might be lost ! The awful brutality of his last speech to her, spoken in a gust of rage ; the reference to an act, in cannibal savagery far out-heroding any outrage in the Indian Mutiny, now occurred to Manuel, and actually brought with the recollection of it a temporary sense of humiliation and shame. How could he have said it to her—he, a civilised man, albeit so wild in the impulsiveness of his savage nature ?

Stooping softly over her, he soon assured himself that she had merely fainted, and would soon, he hoped, recover. He felt her heart—its pulsation was barely discernible ; he put his ear to her parted lips, but could discover no respiration. It would come anon, he thought ; and, dipping his handkerchief in a runnel that trickled through the waste, he bathed her temples tenderly in the cool water. And now he did what he had never dared do before : he clasped her to his breast ; he caressed her hair, her hands, and he kissed her unconscious face again and again, till the very ardour of his endearments seemed to recall her to the world, and to a sense of her own danger and her own exceeding misery.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, like an awakening from a terrible dream to a more terrible reality, and while a sharp but faint cry escaped her, with all the strength of her small hands she repulsed and drove him back.

Staggering upward, she clung to a cane for support, and disdaining the assistance of his hand, warned him back by a repellent gesture of her own, and he began again to eye her moodily.

That she, a highly-bred and accomplished English girl, accustomed to every luxury and ease that wealth could give her, should be an outcast in that desolate cane-brake, face to face with, and the victim of, as melodramatic a ruffian as ever figured in the pages of Gustave Aimard, or on the boards of

an American theatre, seemed an unreal and altogether intolerable position.

But had not English ladies quite as gently nurtured, as gently bred, and in many instances more highly born, been, by hundreds, the victims of outrage and butchery, during the great Indian revolt, and at the hands of men who in their ideas of civilisation were unchanged as those who fought in the Patan wars, and under Mohammed Ghori?

Could the gentle Gertrude Templeton, of whose existence she knew nothing, and who at that precise time was driving home from a ball, after being carefully and somewhat ostentatiously shawled by Derinzy, have seen her supposed rival, the belle of Jamaica—yea, and of all the Antilles—prostrate in spirit, crushed with grief and horror, in that lonely cane-brake, and crouching under the dark and menacing eyes of Manuel Moreno, she must have pitied her from her soul.

Manuel had beheld with considerable satisfaction the returned energy of Virginia, all supremely wretched though she was; for his first suspicion, when she fainted, that she was dead, had filled him with terror; for with all his avowed love, the idea of death had terrified him, and he was coward enough and superstitious enough to have fled and left her there.

He took her right hand between his own; it was listless, passive, and wet with her tears. He dropped it with an air of annoyance: and scraping a vesta against a cane, proceeded quietly and coolly to light a cigar.

She now passed a hand across her forehead, and threw her hair back from her temples, as she said, in a singularly touching voice, and with some bewilderment of manner:

‘O Manuel, have pity on me; you are the only kinsman I have in the world besides my dear papa; assure me that this is all some dreadful dream. Why did you bring me here?’

‘To save you from the negroes. You are in no dream at all; surely the canes in this wild brake, and the stars that shine overhead, are patent enough. No house is so safe a hiding place at present as this, Virginia. But a little time, and we may return.’

‘To Mango Garden?’

‘Yes, my dear cousin.’

‘When, Manuel?’

‘When you are sensible, and Mango Garden is mine.’

‘Yours!’ she exclaimed, while her eyes flashed.

‘Precisely so, cousin; but please do not raise your voice so.’

‘Why?’

‘Because others than ourselves may be among these canes to-night, or this morning rather.’

‘What others—fugitives?’

‘Or negroes in search of them.’

‘Vere—Vere—Herbert! Oh, the horror of all this!’ moaned Virginia, but luckily in a voice too low for the listener to hear.

‘I am but one man, and might have too oppose many, if they attempted to take you from me, Virginia, and, with all the love I bear you, I might fail to—’

‘Love!’ she exclaimed, in a tone of loathing; ‘you dare to talk of love to me, and at such a time as this?’

‘When could there be a better?’ he asked, almost languidly, while knocking the ashes from his pipe.

‘After the awful revelation you made me?’ she murmured, in a voice choked with tears.

‘Revelation—I—when—what?’ he asked, with cool effrontery.

‘Of my darling papa’s death.’

‘Surely you mistake!’

‘Oh, no; oh, no!’ wailed Virginia; ‘in that I made no mistake.’

‘What did I say?’

‘I can scarcely tell you the exact words; but their horrible import brought conviction and horror to my very soul, Manuel!’

‘There has been some mistake—some misconception of my words,’ continued he plausibly, as her grief worried him and defeated the object he had in view—to bend her to his will, and force her, for safety and protection, to accept his

love. Thus, so far as her father was concerned, he was glad to tell her, *pro tem.*, any falsehood to soothe and quiet her ; and as the drowning grasp at straws, so did Virginia cling, in her exceeding misery, to any hope held out to her by her wily cousin, and in that he was but too successful.

Assure me of this, and I will bless you—even will I kiss you, Manuel Moreno !

And in the outburst of her great gratitude, her sweet quivering lips, all wet with her tears, touched his thick black moustache for an instant.

‘I wish you could assure me as well of something else, my sweet cousin.’

‘Of what, Manuel?’ she asked, eluding his arm.

‘That your affair with that Englishman Vere was only a flirtation.’

‘I never flirt,’ said the beauty, almost coyly now, in the great revulsion of her spirits.

‘Oh, Virginia !’

‘I am only civil to people who are civil to me. But what was that? Did you not hear something among the canes, Manuel?’

‘I heard nothing,’ said he ; but he cocked the locks of his double-barrelled rifle, and peered into the gloom, out of which the slender stems towered into the starlit sky, with an expression of face that showed—if compelled to do so—he would let fly at any intruder without much compunction.

They listened intently ; in the vast extent of the cane-brake there was no sound, save the occasional plash when a leaf, overcharged with dew, let its diamond-like contents drop on the grass below ; the insects had ceased to hum, and the croak of the tree-toad had died away.

A whole day of seclusion and partial starvation, save so far as wild fruit is considered, now passed in that dreary place ; another night followed, and Manuel Moreno, with considerable exasperation, was beginning to reflect that neither in the matter of his love nor his monetary prospect had he bettered himself by the revolt.

'You look weary, cousin,' said Manuel, as he could see the almost ghastly pallor of the girl's face in the first ray of dawn, now coming in with its tropical rapidity.

'And I am weary, Manuel, nigh unto death, after the two nights of horror I have undergone; but thank you, dear Manuel: your assurances of papa's safety have filled me with such joy that, with all my weariness of body and spirit, I cannot sleep. Yet would that I could do so till my darling papa comes to waken me!'

Manuel thought her sleep would be a long and lasting one under these circumstances; but seeing how her head drooped he merely said:

'If you can sleep, do so, and restore your strength; that poncho of mine is impervious even to the dew; so sleep, Virginia, and I will watch. Sleep, dear cousin,' he continued, with more of real compassion and tenderness than he had ever shown before. And after all her terrible and varied tumults of thought, yielding to his entreaties and her own dire necessity, Virginia, at the root of the same great cane where she had sat down overnight, actually dropped into a slumber at last—a slumber born of toil of the mind and body, toil of the heart and soul—all unaware that she slept with her sweet face upon the shoulder of Manuel Moreno—her serpent cousin.

Dark though his complexion, he was undoubtedly handsome in figure and face, but the dominant characteristics of his features were vanity, sensuality, and utter selfishness, with much of cruelty; and in the furtherance of his own ends there was no length he was not perfectly capable of going.

Meanwhile the vast morning sun came up in his glory from the Caribbean Sea, and between a deep and stupendous ravine—a rift cleft by some throe of Nature—in the Blue Mountains his light was poured like a crimson and then like a golden flood above the summits of the lofty canes, though all remained in purple twilight below; for so thick was the foliage and intervening greenery that no ray of sunlight ever penetrated to where Virginia lay. But now the hum of busy

insect life began again in the wild brake ; the bats had vanished, but the brightly plumaged little paroquets flitted to and fro, making the whole instinct with life.

So intently was Manuel Moreno watching, and with glowing ardour, the fair face of the sleeper, so alluringly soft and innocent in the helpless expression of its perfect repose—the dark lashes, so lately matted with tears, closed upon the cheek ; the delicate eyelids that quivered ever and anon, as if she dreamt of sad things in her sleep ; the parted lips, to which the colour was now returning again, and between which he could see her pearl-like upper teeth ;—so intent, we say, was the watcher on all this, that he was quite unaware of a *third* personage being added to the group—a herculean and gigantic negro, of vast proportions and muscular development, a man of the most repulsive aspect, who came crawling along softly on his hands and knees, his eyeballs gleaming like those of a cobra, with a long sharp knife clenched in his glistening teeth, and who restrained his very breathing till his colossal hand had clutched the throat of Manuel with savage tenacity of grasp.

‘Quashy !’ exclaimed his compatriot, in a choking voice, and the next moment he found himself pinned helplessly to the earth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BROKEN HOME.

WE have said that, in the horror of his mind and the great hurry of his thoughts, bodily activity and exertion were a species of relief to Herbert Vere, who, to Finch’s well-intentioned and genuine hopes that the whole thing might prove a hoax or mistake, had no replies to make, as the affairs of the past night had too terribly evinced the atrocities of which the negroes were capable, and the idea of Virginia being in their power—carried off by them, as the fatal note had it—put him beside himself with rage and fear ; and his soldiers,

who had never before seen him excited, gazed at each other in silent speculation, as they pushed forward at a rapid pace, which ever and anon broke into a double march.

Toby Finch had no stale jokes to repeat on the subject of Miss Bellingham now. He saw how thoroughly Vere was roused and excited ; and, as an English gentleman, Toby shared to the fullest extent his comrade's terror and anxiety that a lady should be in hands so terrible.

They could but anticipate the worse that was possible ; yet their ideas could take no form in words ; and the memories of Delhi and Cawnpore were sadly fresh in their minds.

'Yes, yes,' Vere muttered, as if assenting to some thoughts of his own ; 'he was right who wrote that "human life is a sort of target—misfortune is always firing at it, and hitting the mark." But in few human lives—even those of soldiers—do misfortunes such as this occur.'

'We may yet be in time to save her, Vere ; have some hope.'

'I have none, Toby.'

'What then ?'

'Something better,' said Vere, through his clenched teeth.

'What can be better than hope ?'

'In this dreadful instance, resolution and the intent to have vengeance, so far as martial law will give it to me. These wretches are all at our mercy now, and not a man of them shall escape,' exclaimed Vere, whose excited imagination pictured Virginia Bellingham in all her beauty and utter helplessness, the sport and victim of a band of yelling negroes, if she had not—as he too surely anticipated—perished under their hands already.

The morning was one of wonderful beauty, even for the Antilles ; and mighty peaks and splintered cliffs of the Blue Mountains, with all the wealth of forest that clothed their sides, stood clearly up against the softer azure of the cloudless sky ; and as Vere with his party proceeded further inland, and thus attained higher ground, they could see the ocean in their rear spreading far away to a horizon that was

perfectly undefined, so completely did sea and sky seem to blend or melt altogether into one.

‘There is a war steamer rounding the headland to the westward, Mr. Vere,’ said a sergeant named Wilton.

‘It is the *Wolverine* from Kingston,’ added Toby Finch, adjusting his binocular ; ‘she is full of troops. Kyrle Desborough and the rest of our fellows, no doubt.’

‘On, on !’ exclaimed Vere ; ‘we can neither halt nor linger now.’

Steaming with what breeze there was, the war ship formed a beautiful object as she glided on the glassy sea slowly along the coast, while high into the soft and ambient air the smoke from her funnel rose in a thin straight column, till it melted imperceptibly away.

Excited fugitives, some of them planters, mounted and well armed, informed Vere that the insurrection was spreading, and of the risk he ran in venturing inland with so small a party of troops ; but he resolved to proceed, and he knew that his men would follow him anywhere ; and now that their blood was fairly up they looked as if ready to face anything.

One fugitive announced that the rebels were in arms on Sir William Fitzherbert’s estate, and had barbarously destroyed his overseer ; that at Amity Hall, twenty miles from Morant Bay, Mr. Hire had been killed, and many other whites left for dead ; and all confirmed the murder of Mr. Bellingham. ‘That other persons were not subsequently killed,’ says a writer on this revolt, ‘is due, not to the mercy of the rebels, but to the fact that for the most part their intended victims had escaped into the woods or cane-fields, or out to sea in canoes. Let the words of the rebels, heard by Mr. Harrison of Hordley estate, the warnings given to Mr. Hinchelwood of the Mulatto river, and many other facts and statements given in the correspondence published in the Blue-books, declare what would have been the fate of the white men and ladies and children had they been got hold of. .

It would be impossible to convey within any reasonable limits the prompt and decisive action of Governor Eyre at

this critical juncture. So great was the danger of the whole black population rising, if the rebels were allowed to get beyond the Blue Mountain range into the interior of the island ; so dreadful were the accounts of apprehended outbreaks in every district ; so small was the force of military at his disposal for the protection of the entire colony, that the only surprise is that throughout that terrible period he remained so cool and collected, and was enabled to act with such consummate judgment. One single false step, one moment's hesitation, and Jamaica would have been taken from our grasp, to be reconquered only with a still more terrible loss of life, and at a price frightful to contemplate.'

Here and there, as Vere's party advanced, the smoke of incendiary fires ascended high into the air, from the extensive green savannahs and deep shady ravines in the mountains sides : but he was agreeably surprised that there was no such appearance in the direction of Mango Garden, the non-destruction of which was owing to the interest which the conspirators knew Manuel Moreno to possess therein.

Certain remarks that passed between Vere and Toby Finch, and were overheard by the soldiers, made them quite *au fait* of the tender interest the former had in the lost lady, apart from humanity and duty, and thus they became as full of sympathy and enthusiasm in the task before them, as if Vere's case were each man's own ; and the soldiers saw in his face now, for the first time, a dark black look that marred the expression even of his handsome features, while in silence, and with something of that quiet and stern concentration of thought and purpose which reminded Vere of the advance from Mungulwar to Lucknow, his little band went quickly on, with their rifles at the trail, amid a breathless atmosphere, between fields of coffee, ginger, and cotton, and groves of cedar and mahogany.

Ere long the rows of cabbage-trees with their graceful waving foliage, some more than a hundred feet in height, showed Vere that they had reached the Bellingham estate, and soon other familiar objects met his view. He passed

the place where with Virginia he had found shelter under the leafy branches from the rain and storm, and where his chance introduction to her came about. How well he could recall her face, her figure, and all that had occurred, and the appearance of the old planter, her father, as he welcomed them at the door of his hospitable mansion !

There too was the Shaddock Grove, which, from the similarity of the name, made them often recall and speak laughingly of the Shaddock Grove of Bernardin St. Pierre's delightful romance, and that other Virginia who was so sweet, so gentle, and ill-fated. The eyes of Vere were wandering over ravines and clefts in the mountains, where often he had driven or ridden with Virginia Bellingham, and where they had idled for hours with their reins dropped loosely on their horses' necks, when suddenly Sergeant Wilton, who was a wary old soldier, exclaimed :

'Look out, Mr. Vere ; there is steel flashing in yonder field.'

'Halt !' cried Vere ; 'where, Wilton ?'

'On our left, sir.'

The sergeant was right ; for in the place indicated, among a late field of maize, Vere detected the glittering tips of one or two bayonets, and was certain that an ambush awaited him there ; so he threw out his little force in skirmishing order on the move and opened a random file-fire, which had the effect of dislodging from their concealment some thirty or forty armed negroes, who, after firing a few futile shots, took to flight with yells of rage and terror, leaving some of their number killed or wounded behind them.

Oddly enough, in one or two instances, where the woolly heads suddenly sank down, bare black feet appeared instead, as the stricken bounded about in their agony and fear. Through the yellow maize swept the red-coated skirmishers at a rush with a cheer, and issued upon the lawn before the mansion of Mango Garden, where Sergeant Wilton appeared with a prisoner, a tall and herculean-like negro, whose red tongue was lolled out, and whose face became almost pea-green in

his terror of his captor's sword-bayonet, by which he was pricked forward without much mercy till he was in front of Vere.

'Quashy !' exclaimed the latter, in astonishment.

A half-spent ball had struck the negro on the back of the head and partially stunned him ; yet he had the cunning to throw away his weapons, and, when captured, to assume an air of injured innocence, and to welcome Vere as 'Massa Bellingham's friend' very warmly, but with an air of bewilderment and consternation that sprang less from the perilous predicament in which he found himself, than from the startling conviction that he had been struck down by a bullet and become the white man's prisoner, and that consequently he had no Obeah at all.

The Obeah man had deluded him, after the most solemn incantations, made by means of earth gathered from a grave, and broth made, not unlike that of Macbeth's Witches, with the liver of a white cock, the feathers of a crow, egg-shells, and the teeth of a snake.

'Is it true that your master has been killed and Miss Bellingham carried off?'

'Too true, Massa Vere, too true. Oh, poor Massa Bellingham ! poor Massa Bellingham ! He good massa to poor black nigger ; yet him dear old head all smashed like a pumpkin. Oh, lorry gorry ! oh, lorry gorry !' he added, affecting to whine and weep.

Thus he succeeded for a little time in deceiving Vere, who knew him to have been one of Mr. Bellingham's most trusted servants ; moreover, he was only found near the house, and without arms.

Subsequent evidence adduced before one of the many courts-martial held for the trial and execution of the insurgents, and especially at one of which Vere was himself president, proved that it was by the hand of Quashy that Mr. Bellingham fell, having his brains dashed out by a club ; and that the vile ungrateful negro was full of rage and jealousy on finding that his young mistress had escaped, and, more than

all, had been carried off by Manuel Moreno, whom he conceived to be fighting at Morant Bay.

The apparently quiet departure of the cousins had been observed by the little boy of whom Virginia made a household pet, and Quashy had been hurrying in pursuit with a party at the very time the latter had been detected in the field of maize by Sergeant Wilton.

Mechanically Vere entered the house to prosecute his inquiries. Could it be, he asked himself, that he was again in Mango Garden? And so full had he been of exciting thought amid the broil of the night, that it was scarcely possible to realise the conviction that but yesterday evening he had been there with Virginia, and sat with her hand in hand and eye bent tenderly on eye. The drawing-room windows were open, and the warm morning air came through them laden with the delicious fragrance of Virginia's roses, that grew in masses round the pillars of the verandah. And where was she who loved so well to tend them?

With her music strewed all about, there stood her open piano, just as she had started from it when Manuel Moreno suddenly entered. Would her delicate fingers ever touch its keys again? A sense of her presence, given by these inanimate objects, made her undoubted absence more terrible; for these silent witnesses filled the heart of Vere with a grief and dismay beyond the power of language.

On every hand and in every room were signs of the havoc and devastation made by Quashy and his gang overnight; furniture smashed, mirrors and vases, statuary and ornaments, all wantonly broken. Those household *lares* or *penates*, the pride of the old planter's heart, the portrait of Colonel Obadiah Bellingham in his corselet and falling bands, and the genealogical tree, in which his descendants figured so amply, had been all slashed, torn, and riddled, while he lay dead and mutilated on the floor of the room where they hung.

Vere's investigations were very brief, as the pursuit and rescue of Virginia, or the task of avenging her, required instant consideration.

Complicity in guilt or sympathy with the black cause, stupidity or fear, rendered the dead man's household, especially the female portion thereof, unable or incapable of giving him either aid or information, as their whole minds were intent on pandering to that superstition which is so rampant in the Antilles.

All the mirrors and looking-glasses that were left unbroken were covered or turned to the walls, lest the spirit of 'Massa Bellingham, or of Missy Virginia,' if she too were dead, should be reflected in them ; all the water in the house was being carefully emptied, that death might cool his dart in it ; and beside the dead planter a jar of water, with a light to be kept burning for nine nights, was placed, to enable the spirit of the deceased to quench his thirst if it returned ; and many other mummeries imported from Africa by the negro slaves of old were in process at Mango Garden, when Vere, with a heavy and anxious heart, and with Quashy as his guide, turned his back upon the desolate dwelling, and marched quickly up the mountain path that led towards the cane-brake, as Quashy, from instincts of his own, from traces he had discovered, and certain information that had been given him, was sure that Virginia and her captor were in the vicinity of that place.

Vere had offered him a keg of rum, a gold watch, anything he could wish for, to aid in the errand of mercy ; and Quashy, who had views of his own in the matter, not the least of which was to achieve his liberty and join the revolted negroes, acquiesced most readily ; but night had closed ere plans were adjusted and preparations made.

A bribe was offered the negro on one hand, with the distinct intimation on the other that on the slightest indication of treachery or attempt to escape he would be shot down without the smallest mercy, and in this arrangement Quashy acquiesced with an indescribable grin.

Dawn was close at hand when the pursuing party reached the cane-brake, between two mountains, the rugged cliffs of which were tufted with the richest foliage. Guided either by

instinct or foreknowledge—which Vere and Finch never knew—the negro speedily selected the same narrow pathway which Moreno and Miss Bellingham, the latter wearily and with fainting steps, had traversed together ; and after daylight fairly broke, bursting suddenly upon the world in a flood of ruddy golden light, as it generally does in the tropics, the quick eyes of Quashy detected in several places among the soft pulpy leaves and bruised grass, in places where Vere could see no trace at all, the footmarks of two persons—marks that were those of a man by their weight and size, and others that were as evidently those of a woman by their shape and being smaller and lighter, and in one spot where some mud lay they were distinctly seen beyond all doubt.

In one place the fag end of a cigar and a vesta match were found ; further on a piece of scarlet-silk ribbon, evidently a knot from the muslin dress which Vere remembered Virginia wore on the evening he last saw her.

Some yards beyond was a fragment of the fragile dress itself, adhering to a species of cactus plant. Each of these indications of being on the sure trail elicited chuckles from Quashy, and led him to indulge in many strange negro ejaculations expressive of extreme satisfaction, while they filled the mind of Vere with mingled hope and dismay.

Bad as Moreno was, and capable of any atrocity, Vere confessed to himself that Virginia was safer in his hands than in those of the negroes. Whether this precious cousin had the power of protecting her from his black compatriots ; whether he feared his ability to do so, now that the dreadful storm had burst, and the die of rebellion been cast ; or what was his precise object in luring Virginia from home, and keeping her for some thirty-six hours like a gipsy in that desolate cane-brake, it is impossible now to say with certainty ; but any way, the terrible sequel to the episode was close at hand.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FATAL RESCUE.

THE party guided by Quashy had proceeded nearly to within a hundred yards of where we left Virginia sunk in the deep slumber that comes of weariness of mind and body, while Manuel Moreno watched her, when the negro paused, and said to Vere :

‘Massa Moreno and Missy Bellingham are in de cane-brake.’

‘I should hope so, after bringing us all this distance ; so remember your promised rewards, Quashy, rewards which I shall double.’

‘Speak low, Massa Vere, speak low!’ said the negro huskily.

‘Are we so close to them?’ said Vere, in a whisper.

‘I tink so, massa ; but no sure quite,’ replied Quashy, stooping (for in stature he towered over Vere by a head), and applying his great red blubber-like lips closer to the ear of the listener than the latter relished.

‘Close up, men,’ said Vere, in a low voice to his soldiers, who silently cocked their Enfield rifles ; ‘we shall go on at a rush.’

‘No—no—no, Massa Vere!’ exclaimed Quashy, in his low husky voice.

‘Why?’ asked Vere impetuously.

‘Dat spoil all ; better go back to Mango Garden.’

‘How—what *do* you mean, fellow?’

‘Hush! You want to catch Massa Moreno and save Missy Bellingham?’

‘Of course,’ replied Vere, with fierce impatience ; ‘the latter at all hazards. So why all this twaddle?’

‘Well, by golly lorry, you no like to do either by rushing on,’ replied Quashy, with a diabolical grin.

‘Why not?’

‘On the first alarm he will kill her and himself too.’

'Can you think so?' asked Vere, with agitation.

'Me sartain, massa, me sartain.'

'It is his savage nature which speaks,' said Finch.

'It is um savage knowledge of what Manuel Moreno can do, massa officer,' said Quashy sententiously, as he drew himself up to his full height, with that air of unintentional mock dignity which a negro can so well assume, and which at another time would have been amusing, as he put his hand on his heart and rolled his big beady eyes in an alarming manner; 'if discovered, I tell you, Massa Vere, he will kill rather than yield Missy Bellingham to you or any man.'

'Is he quite capable of that, Quashy?'

'Cut gizzard out of um own father, if he wanted it.'

'We must surprise him.'

'Massa Vere not able to do so.'

'What then?' asked Vere, sighing with rage at all this most unexpected parley.

'Allow me to follow him trail alone, like a snake; you guard the cane-brake along all this side of the way, and no let Massa Moreno escape, while I creep in and cut um throat if I can.'

'Your idea is not a bad one, Quashy,' said Vere; and little foreseeing how he was to be deluded by the artful savage who addressed him, and whom he simply believed to have been a faithful and attached servant to Mr. Bellingham, he acceded to the plan, and softly posted his party in extended order, at more than the usual distances, as a chain of sentinels or skirmishers, with orders to shoot down or bayonet any man they found who refused to surrender, or seemed to be making his escape; and in this fashion they remained among the canes and jungle, crouching and listening intently and in perfect silence, while Quashy crept onward alone and speedily disappeared.

For some time all remained intensely, oppressively, and to Vere it seemed painfully still; the buzz, the hum of insect life, amounting almost to a booming sound at times, alone was there. The minutes that elapsed seemed as if hours,

and suspicion suggested to Vere that Quashy might have deceived him, and only crept away, not to return, but to achieve his own liberty, if he had really incurred any penalty.

Suddenly there rang out amid the stillness of that desolate place a horrible and despairing cry, followed by the shrill and prolonged shriek of what was evidently the voice of a female, making all who heard them start convulsively.

‘Forward, men!’ cried Vere, brandishing his sword; ‘forward, my lads, and look well about you!’

Instinctively converging to the point whence the cries came, the soldiers made their way through the wilderness of cane and jungle, and among the first to reach the spot were Vere and Finch.

There, on his back, lay Manuel Moreno dead, with the blood yet welling forth from two deep gashes in his breast, and in his grasp was the fragment of a muslin skirt; but where was the negro guide, and where was Virginia?

But a little way from where the dead man lay, with the insects already battenning in his oozing blood, the cane-brake ended abruptly at the verge of a precipice, whence could be seen on one side an extensive view of wood and savannah, stretching away towards the Blue Mountains, and, on the other, broken cliffs and rugged ground, beyond which lay an inlet of the sea.

‘Silence! listen!’ said Vere, in a breathless voice; and all listened. But not a sound was heard save the chattering of the paroquets overhead; nor could a trace of Quashy or the girl be seen. The soldiers then scattered about in the brake, shouting singly, then by twos, threes, and all together, but there came no response; and there was but one way the missing could have gone unseen—down the precipice; and that such was the fact some proof was afforded by the discovery, within a few yards of Moreno’s body, of the strong tendril of a wild vine, hanging over the verge, half rent and torn recently, and there too the turf marks of fresh abrasion.

‘By heaven, sir, there they are, the nigger and the lady!’

cried a corporal, as from the verge of the cliff where they stood, upon a plateau of rock, about sixty feet below, the sable form of Quashy, half naked, lithe and powerful, was seen with his victim—whether dead or alive it was impossible to say—flung over his shoulders like a scarf.

‘What does he mean? what took the fool down there?’ said the soldiers.

Blind desperation, revenge, and death, Vere thought. Quashy now looked back to the group of soldiers gathered on the wall-like cliff above him, and shaking his clenched hand at them in defiance, uttered a mocking shout, and, ere a shot could be fired at him, plunged over a ridge, and with Virginia in his grasp disappeared.

For accoutred soldiers, or almost any man who was not so desperate and furious as the negro Quashy, to descend where he had done was impossible; but Vere’s men, almost without waiting for any word of command, divided into two parties, tacitly to all appearance, and choosing two ways, went plunging down the face of the declivity, out of which the precipice abutted, and in a few minutes they came rushing up the ridge beyond which the negro had vanished with his victim.

Until we are thoroughly roused we know not the wells of passion that may be in us. Civilisation, fashion, and custom keep them pent and in subjection; but a time comes when the impulses of human nature prove too strong for cold custom, colder fashion, and enforced civilisation, and then the true devil that lurks in the human heart has full sway; thus, at the time we are now describing, Vere felt himself in his just fury as savage as the savage he was pursuing.

Beyond the ridge was an expanse of broken ground, scattered canes, wild tobacco plants, watercourses, ravines, and dry nullahs intersecting a long slope that terminated in a cliff above the inlet of the sea referred to.

Suddenly a shout burst from the soldiers, who were all hurrying forward in a kind of semicircle, but scattered far apart, as the figure of Quashy became visible again, but at a great

distance, so much time had been lost by the *détour* made to gain the lower ground.

The light figure of the girl he carried, and from whom no cry for aid or fear escaped, seemed but as that of a child in the grasp of Quashy ; a dark bronze-looking Hercules, who united the lithe activity of the antelope to the strength of a bull, as he went rushing wildly onward. More than once his foot tripped and he fell with her in his arms—fell heavily ; a maddening sight to all, but to Vere especially. He knew that her delicate limbs must by this time be a mass of bruises and discolorations, by the force and fury of the negro's grasp, apart from those falls on the rugged ground. While his soldiers ever and anon dropped on their knees and took aim, yet feared to fire lest they might injure the young lady, Vere more than once tried his field-glass for a moment ; but excitement dimmed his vision, he saw nothing, and when he looked again the savage was further than ever ahead, and, hemmed in by the soldiers, was swiftly breasting his way uphill and towards the cliff that overhung the sea.

With what object ?

What could it be but vengeance now, not escape ! Quashy's object at first had no doubt been to achieve the latter, after killing Moreno and securing Virginia as his prey ; but his plans or hopes were evidently baffled now.

'Your rifle, please, Sergeant Wilton !' exclaimed Vere ; 'at all hazards I must try to bring the scoundrel down.'

'You are trembling, Vere,' said Toby Finch ; 'give me the rifle, and I will shoot.'

In his intentness of purpose Vere never heard his brother officer, but quickly sighting the rifle for some two hundred yards' distance, he knelt, aimed, and fired. The negro threw up his arms wildly for a moment, permitting Virginia to fall heavily on the ground ; then, stooping, he clutched her again, and with a cry like the last yell of a dying fiend he again resumed his flight.

'Another shot—another shot, sir ; try again !' cried the soldiers.

'Shoot, for God's sake, Tom Kenny !' said Vere to one whom he knew to be a crack shot.

The soldier instantly knelt, with left elbow on his left knee, sitting well back upon his right heel, and his butt firmly planted against his right shoulder in the grasp of the left hand. He took aim, but paused, saying :

' I cannot fire, sir.'

' Why ?'

' For fear of hitting the lady.'

' At this distance ? Aim low.'

' There is a draw on my trigger, sir.'

' Give *me* the rifle !' cried Vere impetuously. He then threw himself flat on the earth, in the Wimbledon fashion, at full length, with the weapon resting firmly on the turf, and he aimed at Quashy's legs, as he would have done at the running deer, ahead of the object—fired, and Quashy reeled.

' Hit again, hit again ; hurrah !' cried the soldiers. ' Here is another cartridge, Mr. Vere ; have another shy, sir.'

Shot after shot was sent after Quashy, so the spell that withheld the hands of the men seemed broken ; but while still staggering onward, with blood streaming from his limbs—blood that dyed with crimson the rent and tattered muslin dress of Virginia—he placed her between him and the line of fire, as a species of buckler, and menacingly brandished his knife above her head, as much as to say that he would use it without mercy if fired upon again ; and, while the soldiers paused in irresolution, he vanished into another ravine ; and again they went plunging on in fierce pursuit, animating each other by shouts and cries.

Side by side in the hunting-field, neck and neck at a hurdle-race, shoulder to shoulder in the charge on more than one Indian battlefield, had Vere and Finch been together, but never had they felt the fierce and high excitement of the present chase for life and death.

Was Virginia dead, or in a helpless swoon ? It was impossible to say. Thrice when the savage had fallen with her, or permitted her to fall on the turf or rocks, she was seen

to lie still and motionless, till he picked her up and swayed her over his left shoulder, with her head and long dark dishevelled hair drooping downward, as he ran on and on in his terrible race.

Now, as they came scrambling out of the last hollow, a terrible tableau met the eyes of Vere, Finch, and Sergeant Wilton, who had distanced all their comrades.

Clearly defined against the blue sky, on the very verge of a beetling cliff that overhung the sea, white, boiling, and foaming three hundred feet and more below, were the figures of the negro and his victim, who had evidently recovered her senses ; revived perhaps by the pleasant breeze that came from the open sea. She was on her knees, with her back to Quashy, with her hands crossed upon her bosom.

The left hand of the giant negro was wreathed amid the masses of her beautiful hair ; his right held aloft the knife, which he again brandished menacingly towards his pursuers, who could hear his savage laugh, though too far off to see his ghastly smile—ghastly indeed, for he had lost much blood from his wounds.

Neither could they see the saint-like expression of resignation in the wan and woeful face of the poor girl, who felt that her last hour—nay, her last moment—had come, and that she was to perish terribly and cruelly, under the very eyes of the man she loved, and who, she knew, loved her well. But there was little time given for thought, for prayer, or for reflection now.

‘He is just a hundred yards off,’ said Tom Kenny ; ‘I can safely put a bullet into him now ; no fear of hitting the pigeon and missing the crow,’ he added, almost with a smile ; and, taking a brief aim at the broad bare breast of Quashy, fired.

Again the latter threw up his arms wildly as his blood spurted, for the ball must have pierced him through and through. He reeled as if about to fall. For a moment Virginia was free, and was in the act of rushing towards Vere, when Quashy, exerting the last efforts of death, despair, and

savage vengeance, clutched her in his arms, and sprang with her over the cliff, whence they fell whizzing through the air, to vanish among the surf that seethed three hundred feet below.

A shout of sorrow and rage—rage that so many armed men—all trained soldiers—should be baffled thus by one—escaped the soldiers, and then they surveyed each other in silence.

To Vere's natural sorrow and horror was added the most terrible contrition for the manner in which he had permitted himself to be deluded by Quashy. With all his past Indian experiences, the simple and confiding English officer knew not the depth of treachery and bloodshed of which the negro was capable.

To Quashy and his compatriots it signified nothing that Mr. Bellingham and other planters had always treated them since the emancipation like Christians, when most of them were mere savages, believing in Obeah men and worshipping fetishes; had paid them fair and liberal wages, helped them in sickness, and befriended them in health. They hated their masters as white men, collectively rather than individually, and, perhaps, more than all, traditionally, on the score that all masters were buckra tyrants, and all black men were slaves.

Vere's heart was more crushed and stricken than it had ever been after a sanguinary battle; for in no battle had he ever lost more than a dear comrade or so; but now his blood seemed to freeze. He covered his eyes with his hand to shut off the glare of the tropical sun, and turned away from the cliff, lest the sight and sound of the sea below might drive him mad.

'The curse of heaven be on the blazing nigger! and, oh, but he was hard to kill!' said Tom Kenny, surveying the gouts of blood that covered all the place, while mechanically putting another cartridge into his rifle.

But for the presence of Toby Finch, the sergeant, and the

soldiers, as breathless and blown they all came scrambling up in quick succession with their rifles, the unfortunate Vere could scarcely have believed that the whole episode was aught else than a dreadful dream, from which he would waken to find Virginia, with her music, flowers, or birds, as usual in the shaded drawing-room at Mango Garden !

The perfume of the flowers about that horrible cliff affected him as musk does some delicate persons. He grew giddy, and would have reeled towards its verge but for the strong hand of Sergeant Wilton, who grasped his waistbelt and dragged him back.

Virginia, with all her loveliness and wondrous attractions, was gone—gone, at peace and at rest, as completely as if she had never existed, and no hand, save that which raised Lazarus from the dead and restored the widow's son, could bring her back. All was over now ; but it was an awful ending and an awful grave !

From the day he first met her, and after which their intimacy so speedily ripened into friendship, and from friendship warmed to love, he seemed to re-read their past as if it were all condensed into one brief sentence ; and he reproached himself with not having, he feared, appreciated Virginia enough.

But his sorrow as yet was not a passionate one. The catastrophe was so sudden, so deadening, by a strange sense of its unreality, of its being impossible, that he felt and seemed stunned and stupefied ; and, like a man in a dream, mechanically took the proffered arm of Toby Finch, and set out with his party on their return to Morant Bay.

When full reflection came he longed intensely to turn his back for ever on the Antilles ; but there was no time accorded him for mooning by the sea or searching by its rocky shore ; for there were other homes in Jamaica then as desolate as that at Mango Garden—homes where women's hearts were breaking, and their tears flowing over the fallen, the murdered, and the lost. So much work was yet to be done—savagely and disastrous, though justly retributive, work—ere he was

to see the Blue Mountains melting into the sea ; and the fate of her he had lost steeled the heart of Vere—all kind, gentle, and generous though he was—and he betook him to the task of punishment, for a time, with a severity of which he could not have believed himself capable.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

ABOUT a week after the outrages we have narrated, Vere—glad to be once more with, and under the command of, his old chum Kyrle Desborough—found himself fortunately despatched from the vicinity of Morant Bay, which he now loathed, to other scenes. The governor and General Nelson had made arrangements to save Port Antonio—a rich and beautiful district—from the rebels, who were committing rapine and havoc about twelve miles to the eastward thereof, and were known to be meditating its destruction. Hence a number of the English settlers had taken shelter on board of a large American ship, whose commander, to save them, humanely put to sea.

By occupying Port Antonio in time, the authorities not only saved that district from total destruction, but they met and barred the progress of the insurrection to the eastward of it, and accomplished some important results in a very brief space of time.

All the troops that could be spared from Kingston were effectively disposed of, by being landed on each side of the island to the eastward, whence they marched down on the blacks and completely crushed them in time. One post was established at Morant Bay, another at Port Antonio, and the ground between was occupied by the friendly Maroons. Thus the whole of the rebel force was completely hemmed in within the country eastward of this line ; but meanwhile the alarming reports which came from every other quarter of Jamaica,

and the evident intention of further revolts if opportunity favoured, caused the gravest anxiety in the minds of all the whites.

The total number of her Majesty's troops in the whole island at this crisis was only a thousand men : of these five hundred were engaged in repressing the rebellion, in a district occupied by fully forty thousand blacks ; while the other five hundred were required to protect and garrison Kingston, Up Park Camp, and Newcastle ; and even when succour came from Barbadoes and Nassau, the whole number only amounted to seventeen hundred bayonets.

The rebels in arms were Africans, as uncivilised as they were when in their native wilds, and to such the lash and the bullet could be the only arguments applied. A thousand of their dwellings were burned by the troops ; and though the fact sounded startling to English ears, it should be borne in mind that they were only wretched little huts of cane and thatch, and that in no instance was any hut destroyed unless the plunder taken from our colonists was found in it, thereby showing the complicity of its owner with the revolt.

At Kingston, General O'Connor took all the measures necessary for the protection of the city by increasing the horse and foot volunteers, and enrolling all pensioners. Gordon was captured by the Maroons, and delivered by them to General Nelson, who placed him on board H.M.S. *Wolverine*, after which he was tried by a court-martial, which found him guilty of the massacre at Morant Bay, and generally of riot, rebellion, and insurrection, and sentenced him to death. Accordingly he was hanged over the arch of the ruined Court-house, wherein so many of our people had perished ; and with that event, which made some noise among certain sympathisers in England, ended all that Vere had to do with the brief insurrection in Jamaica.

The military duty of hurrying from place to place, the courts-martial, and the executions attendant thereon, formed almost a relief to his heated mind, after that awful catastrophe by the seashore. The Jamaica colonists are exceedingly fond

of 'playing at soldiers;' and, considering how monotonous life is in the Antilles, it is not to be marvelled at that whatever creates stir and excitement proves pleasing. But it was no playing at soldiers while the storm raised by Bogle, Gordon and Moreno lasted, creating those events which will long figure in the *nancy* stories of the future—for these stories are a species of nursery and legendary tales, with which the negroes amuse and terrify each other and the young children of their master's family, the principal ingredient being the marvellous and startling, yet generally ending with a good moral. Accompanied, as they often are, by wild and mournful chants, they have all the influence of ghost stories, with much more ingenuity, and have hence an impression on the young that is far from salutary.

But to return to our own story. The 'shindy,' as Desborough called it was entirely over, and martial law had ceased. Vere was again in his old quarters at Up Park Camp, after having had more to do, he averred, 'than Œdipus or the devil himself,' and having twice escaped assassination—once in particular from a negro who lurked in a tree, and tried to lasso him with a noosed rope, in which attempt he was 'potted' by Tom Kenny; and one evening, early in the autumn of the year that had been so eventful, saw him and Kyrle Desborough lingering together over their cigars and a glass of grog, just as we found them in their hut at Aldershot in the lines of the first brigade of infantry in our opening chapter.

They had much to converse and think about, as that evening they had recent news from England, a luxury of which the peripatetic nature of their recent avocations had completely deprived them.

Vere had been somewhat changed of late, and apt, whenever occasion offered, to indulge in solitude, to 'moon,' as Desborough said, and often was only to be found in the evening by the glow of his cigar, when sought for in the verandah of his quarters by him and Toby Finch.

The wonderful scenery of Jamaica now had lost its charms for him, or only engendered sadness by its association with

the fate of Virginia ; and he longed for the time when he should bid adieu for ever to the broad waters of the Caribbean Sea, that rippled on the shore among cowries and all kinds of beautiful shells, with the white foam, precursor of the coming breeze, cresting its tiny waves ; the soft loveliness of the mighty hills ; the wondrous serenity of the azure sky ; the vast savannahs of emerald hue, and the woods of mingled green and russet. And now that Virginia was no more, he thought, with a certain emotion of compunction, how readily he had abandoned himself to the love of her, and sought her love in return, as if seeking thereby to crush out that which he felt for Gertrude Templeton.

He was always sadder after having dreamt of Virginia ; for ‘in a dream,’ says Miss Braddon, ‘we always forget there is such a thing as death.’ The dead seem always to live again. Why is this ? It can only be accounted for by the hypothesis that we too are then in a species of spirit land. And Vere was apt to be rather harassed than soothed by certain wild suggestions and hopes on the part of good-natured Toby Finch—born of novel-reading apparently—to the effect that Virginia might not have perished after all.

‘We did not look enough to see if there were any boats about—or saw none if we did look—or a passing ship,’ said Toby, in a confused way.

‘Well, and what then ?’

‘She might have been picked up, saved, and taken away to Hispaniola or Cuba.’

‘Saved from the grasp—the death-clutch—of that incarnate devil ? O Toby, how can you talk so ?’

‘Well, I am sure I have read of such things ; things quite as out of the way.’

‘In romances ?’

‘Perhaps.’

Vere shook his head sadly.

‘Yes, old fellow, but truth is stranger than fiction,’ persisted Toby ; ‘you may meet her suddenly on a promenade at Kingston, at the next governor’s ball perhaps—who the deuce knows where ?—and——’

‘Finch, do stop, please.’

‘Well, pardon me, Vere, if I offend or suggest hopes that may never be realised.’

Kyrle Desborough indulged in none of his jokes and philippics against the sex now, and pleased Vere by his kindly remarks and sympathy concerning the poor girl whose fate was so terrible.

‘And you were very fond of her?’ he asked on one occasion.

‘Fond is not the word, Kyrle ; never was ; now least of all,’ replied Vere emphatically.

‘Well, I *am* sorry for you, from my soul I am,’ said Kyrle, pressing his hand ; ‘but,’ he added, after a little pause, ‘are you not sure that she was catching your heart on the rebound, as it were?’

‘I can’t think so. I don’t wish to think so now, at all events, when her poor unburied body is tossing in yonder horrid sea.’

‘Off Shark Point,’ said Toby Finch parenthetically.

‘One’s blood runs cold when thinking of the whole affair, Kyrle. I wish you had seen and known her. Well, this Jamaica business is over now ; and if the rest of our battalion is not sent out, home we go, of course, and the sooner the better. I loathe the whole island now.’

‘I have had my sorrow, shock—what you will—also, Vere ; but I never look back at it.’

Every one of the mess knew that Kyrle Desborough had met with something in his past life, but at what precise part in his march through it no one was ever told ; for he kept his own secrets, as we have elsewhere said, so the curious could only marvel and conjecture vaguely.

All Vere’s recollections of Virginia Bellingham were tender and pitiful. She had been so loving, so trusting, and their passion free from all those trammels which beset his affair with Gertrude, whose unaccountable coldness to himself he scarcely cared to think of now. In fact, he had quite dismissed it from his consideration for some time past, for he was haunted by the memory of Virginia. The brief story of

his love for the dead girl was not associated with kettledrums, West End crushings, and steeplechase balls ; it seemed rather an idyl amid tropical sunshine, green leaves, and flowers, and the murmur of sparkling waters, the warbling of birds, and the freshness of the Caribbean Sea.

‘He’ll get over it, Toby,’ said Kyrle Desborough; ‘I never knew a fellow circumstanced as he was that didn’t come to grief in some way.’

‘How?’

‘I mean when on detachment he is sure to spoon on some girl in pure idleness and vacuity—even his landlady, perhaps, if nothing better comes to hand. He talks to her as a friend, on wet days especially, when he can’t get out; then, if pretty, he cares for her as a brother; perhaps they do music and chess together. Then, some fine night, through the medium of a champagne cup or a stiff glass of grog, he discovers that she is downright lovely. I have gone through a cross-fire of all that sort of thing, and of everything of the kind you can think of, Toby, and have never yet made such a fool of myself as I hear you were nearly doing with the coloured girl you used to meet under the cabbage-trees at Morant Bay, till the nigger shindy came and saved you just in time. By Jove! Toby, the Horse Guards should define some distinct line of action for fellows left to themselves on detachment. It is all the more necessary in these cramming days, when exams. are all the go, and it is more necessary for an officer to be up in Chaucer’s obsolete barbarisms, and to prove the superiority of ding-dong-dido over do-di-ding-dong, than to be able to handle a regiment or even a company.’

And now to return to the news that had come from England, and which the two friends were discussing with the aid of some mild cubas and *brandy-parwnee*, as they call it in India.

A desolate change had come over the once beautiful Mango Garden, but Vere of course would visit it no more. To whom the property, so coveted by Manuel Moreno, had gone he knew not; but he had stood by the grave of the poor old

gentleman with Toby Finch, Kyrle Desborough, and the planters of the district, as reverently as if he had been indeed his son.

Virginia ! He thought what could ever blot out the recollection of her face, so sweet and pure, so bright and loving, as he had seen it last ? Yet that evening's news from England gave him cause for some reflection.

Some back numbers of the *Times* and *Morning Post* had reached the mess, and in these journals, under the items of fashionable intelligence, had been announced, though at different dates, the marriage of Rosamund Templeton to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, and the presentation at court of 'Viscount and Viscountess Derinzy on *their* marriage.'

Recent events that we have narrated enabled Herbert Vere to read and re-read with more complacency that which must otherwise have given him a shock.

'So Gertrude is married !' said he, and quietly laid the paper down.

'And Rosamund too, the "Fair Rosamund," the admiration of all the subalterns in Aldershot !' added Desborough, laughing, as he tossed the end of a cigar out of the window and selected another from the box. 'What a world it is, that world of fashion !' he added, laughing.

'Married to old Aldwinkle,' said Vere ; 'it is an atrocity !'

'By Jove, it is superb !'

'Well, let us hope her cloud has a silver lining.'

'Silver ! I believe you, my boy—a gold one ; but not one to be happy under. Poor girl ! But how often have I told you that, like all their set and class, these Templetons were a selfish and cold-blooded lot !'

'But I ever thought better of Rosamund !'

'How ? Is she not just one of those girls "who either never fall in love at all, or do so according to a parental Act of Parliament, passed in the reign of good King Mammon," who, by the way, is still king of these realms ?'

'You wrong Rosamund,' urged Vere ; 'for if that girl had a fancy in the world, Kyrle, it was for your own unworthyself.'

‘I don’t like to think so. I have no vanity to flatter; moreover, I am careful not to be bitten by a little aristocrat again.’

‘Again!’

‘Did I say so?’

‘Yes; and thereby hangs a tale.’

Kyrle Desborough was silent for a few seconds, and then, with one of his cynical laughs, he said:

‘I am usually pretty close about myself, but the word escaped me somehow; yet I don’t mind you, Vere, who are a true friend.’

‘You too have found some bitterness in your time?’

‘There is deuced little I haven’t found or done,’ said Kyrle evasively; ‘yet I often wonder in what form will such wretches as that sordid old woman Templeton—such titled snobs—exist on the other side of the grave, if at all.’

‘How?’

‘Because they live for this world alone, and seem to have no inheritance in the next; and the only love they believe in is one that enables them to queen it in society—a love clothed in purple and fine linen, bedecked with jewels.’

‘Kyrle, how strangely bitter you are!’ said Vere, thinking of the word that had escaped his friend.

‘Not at all; the girl’s marriage is only another specimen of the high-bred heartlessness peculiar to her set, who sacrifice anything for rank and money.’

“Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning, die,
But leave us still our old nobility!”

And yet, and yet,’ added Kyrle, after a pause, ‘though I always thought myself pretty familiar with the psychology of the weaker vessels, I was not quite prepared for this. Poor little girl!’

Vere was half suspecting that Desborough, though he knew him to be not in the least egotistic, was thinking that he *might* have had pity on Rosamund, and saved her from the fate before her, even at the risk of his jolly bachelor days and nights, rights and liberty, latch-keys and unlimited cigars.

But how little could the two men, who were so freely canvassing the subject of her marriage, have known of the agony that was in the heart of Rosamund after Kyrle marched to embark, and the wild, imploring letter she penned for him—a letter penned, but never posted !

‘It is strange how the girl was brought to consent,’ said Vere, who, oddly enough, spoke more—if he did not think more—of the marriage of Rosamund than that of Gertrude.

‘There is nothing strange in it,’ replied Desborough, as he drained his iced grog ; ‘man alive ! they are all alike, those folks of the upper ten. There were the mater’s debts and troubles, the insolence of tradesmen, and those worse than tradesmen—attorneys, the family poverty and the struggle for great appearances ; *per contra*, a house like a palace in the country, another in Portland Place—change all over the world, gold and jewels galore, the family diamonds after being reset, freedom from all annoyance, freedom as a matron to any amount of flirtation ; carriages, horses, a box at the opera, and as many servants as she chose to hire and feed at home or abroad.’

A time came, however, when Kyrle Desborough, who could little foresee it, was to recall with real regret and compunction the sharp remarks and mocking speeches he had made on the marriage of Rosamund.

Vere had no bitter comments to make on that of Gertrude. It is not pleasant to find one’s existence ignored, and one’s self thoroughly supplanted ; but as yet he felt only regret that such a girl as Gertrude should, under any influences, have married such a creature as Jocelyn Derinzy.

‘Poor Gertrude ! he would mutter ; ‘but what does it matter to me now ?’

Yet somehow the sun of the Antilles seemed less bright, and life there, such as it was, after the late calamities, less pleasant ; but, thank heaven, ‘the Queen’s morning drum’ beat as usual for duty, and day after day went by.

It was brown autumn in England now ; and in the hot, breathless time of the Caribbean rainy season Vere could see

in fancy the rich cornfields at home, heavy with wavy golden grain ; the trees just touched with russet, or it might be red or yellow ; the fragrant clover-fields, with the fly-bitten cattle standing therein, mid-leg deep, under the shady chestnuts ; the crows wheeling in the blue welkin ; the evening chimes coming sweetly from the old square village spire, all massed with ivy, their jingle telling of peaceful, beautiful, sylvan England—England in the mature glory of a cool autumn evening ; and then indeed did the soldier's heart go home—home over the far tropical seas—with a yearning that is unspeakable.

As for his late love affair, as Kyrle Desborough said, he would get over it in time ; but all human life is made up of getting over things. Moreover, as a lady writer says with much truth, 'love in a man's life occupies about three lines in a volume ; he does not take it through every page and allow it to head each new chapter ; it crosses the stage of every human existence ; but there are too many actors in the drama of a male career for love long to find standing-room before the scenes.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MYSTERY AT PORTLAND PLACE.

MEANWHILE how was fortune using the girl of whose marriage at that time Kyrle Desborough was taking so harsh a view ?

Everybody who was anybody was of course out of London—town was empty ; but Sir Ayling Aldwinkle found, as he alleged, some necessity [connected with county interests for living at his house in Portland Place. Gertrude had accompanied Rosamund, so whatever the old baronet's business might be, the sisters were with him.

Like every other place, the parks were empty ; there were no visitors, and the days passed in a somewhat dull manner in that long and stately street, where, in the season.

peers and even princes reside, and where occasionally a heraldic hatchment powdered with tears shows that they have exchanged their palatial dwellings for the narrower and humbler home that is allotted to all. Yet the street is quiet usually, even when the season is at its flush, strangely so when we consider that it is so near to Oxford and Regent Streets—two great arteries of busy crowded London, with their strings of vehicles of every kind and size, their brilliant shops, and uncounted thousands hurrying to and fro.

Having but little to attract her attention, it was thus that Rosamund began to observe that Sir Ayling, who daily went forth at a particular hour, instead of turning down the street towards his club, left his house on foot, and entered the gardens of Park Square, a place usually frequented by nurses and children only.

Surprised by the frequency of this occurrence, and by certain episodes at Winklestoke having become suspicious, while disdaining to mention them even to the sister she loved so much, and blushing for what she was about to do, she one day took her own key and also entered the gardens, but by another gate. Sir Ayling, who, with his little Dunderreary skip, assumed to hide the uncertainty of gait induced by age and gout, had preceded her, was nowhere to be seen in the pathways or bowers. Whither could he have vanished?

Supposing that he must have gone into the northern portion of the gardens adjoining the Outer Circle, she descended into the little dark tunnel which leads thereto beneath the Marylebone road, and there saw her venerable spouse in close, earnest, and to all appearance tender conversation with the very object of her suspicions—the woman she had seen on her marriage-day, and at Winklestoke.

‘So—so,’ thought Rosamund, ‘it is here he attends to the interests of the county.’

To advance was to meet them; to retire might attract their attention; and, shrinking aside into a shadowy recess, she was compelled to overhear much of a conversation that

sorely perplexed and insulted her, but which she failed to completely understand ; yet she would have been more than human had she not listened.

‘You are still harping on the old string,’ said Sir Ayling, with a little testiness of manner.

‘Pardon me,’ said the unknown, who was ladylike, handsome, and apparently about forty years of age, as we have stated ; ‘of course I cannot think, sir, that your motives in making this most absurd marriage——’

‘Absurd !’

‘Well, unwise—were mercenary.’

‘I should think not, my dear. Lady Templeton took deuced good care of that, with her solicitors’ assistance,’ replied Sir Ayling, laughing till his Parisian teeth shone white in the twilight of the long archway. ‘But you, even as a child, have ever been accustomed to gratify your own inclinations, in defiance of check and remonstrance, till I have been compelled to tie my purse-strings.’

‘And what am I now ?’

‘Dear to me still, despite all your little follies and errors, despite your profuseness and improvidence.’

‘Thanks for the admission,’ she replied, kissing his long thin white hand ; ‘you know the tender claim I have upon you.’

‘Have I ever ignored it in the most valuable sense ?’

‘So far as money goes, never.’

‘You have still confidence in me, dearest—— ?’

Rosamund failed to catch that name or word.

‘Yes ; but my position is a sad one. Why should I not be where she is ?’

‘She ?’

‘Well, Lady Aldwinkle, as I must call her.’

‘My darling, you are absurd. Kiss me !’

(‘How intolerable is all this !’ thought Rosamund, trembling, she scarcely knew why.)

‘Have I ever failed in my proper affection for you ?’ asked the unknown in a very sweet and earnest tone of voice.

‘Never, my dear one ; nor have I failed you.’

‘Save in keeping my existence unknown to all the world,’ she said sadly and reproachfully, ‘while flaunting before it that girl who seems so cold, so passive, and so lifeless.’

‘Cold she certainly is to me ; but as for being passive, she has a will of her own in trifles at times. She actually insisted on having my new carriage lined with blue, because it suited her complexion better than maroon.’

‘Well, when a man at your years——’

‘No, don’t be rude, Birdie.’

‘Takes to wife a young girl, and one so well born——’

‘Stuff! And then she resented, with all her passiveness, what she was pleased to term my pulling all our bedroom at Winklestoke to pieces, that I might insure perfect polarisation, and, by lying due north and south, secure—with the polar current—the soundest of sleep. This she was pleased to stigmatise as “the faddiest of fads”—most undignified language, you must admit.’

The woman laughed, but not merrily.

‘But now I must go,’ said Sir Ayling suddenly. ‘Here are the gold and enamelled jewels I promised you. They are not too grand for your present position, and will admirably become you. Your little charges in the garden must be impatient by this time ; so ta-ta, darling.’

And presenting her with a morocco case, he tenderly kissed her on both cheeks, and hurried away with his funny little skip ; while the recipient of his attentions also retired, but by the opposite end of the passage ; and to Rosamund’s mind there was something significant even in that. It savoured of secrecy, of preconcertion and prearrangement.

The girl smiled scornfully and proudly as she issued into the sunshine ; and, resolving never more to enter these gardens, sat down in a bower for a few moments to reflect on all she had heard and seen. But all she had listened to, gave her no actual clue to the relations between these two, who conversed so freely of *herself*.

She had not an iota of jealousy on the subject ; for she felt

neither love nor respect—not even gratitude—for what had been done by Sir Ayling Aldwinkle to her family, as all that she deemed but as a part of the price he paid for herself. She felt only indignation that he should dare to canvas some of her petty actions with another ; and with it contempt and much of anger, with wounded pride and alarm in the dread of some horrible public scandal.

Who could this dreadful and mysterious woman be? Rosamund remembered her keen and haunting gaze upon her fatal marriage-day, and conceived she could only be some one with whom Sir Ayling had been entangled in past time, and who exercised over him some fascination still. He was old enough and had been gay enough, the good-natured world said, to have been entangled a thousand times.

She dared not speak on the subject to Lady Templeton ; for though she knew that lax views of men were taken and unreprehended by that noble matron, in her first burst of indignation she was quite capable of rushing to those horrors, her solicitors, at Gray's or some other Inn ; and once in their mischief-making and money-grasping hands, there was no saying how, when, or where the matter might end.

These meetings seemed to savour of an obscure intrigue—an intrigue of which she could scarcely believe Sir Ayling to have been guilty, even in the heyday of his youth ; for he was eminently and undoubtedly a proud and aristocratic man in all his ways and ideas, and all his bearing and turn of thought.

But none can fathom the treachery of which the human heart can be guilty, or the follies into which an old fool, if judiciously flattered, may fall, thought Rosamund ; and her pretty nostrils and sweet lips curled and quivered with angry scorn as she thought of the whole affair, but determined somehow to get at the bottom of it. Yet, with all her determination, long, long was she baffled, till one day—an eventful day she was never likely to forget.

That Sir Ayling should express affection for this woman, whom he called 'Birdie,' gravely puzzled Rosamund.

He seemed, with all his querulous senility, so thoroughly devoted to herself, so proud of her fair dazzling beauty, of her extreme youth and acknowledged attractiveness and many accomplishments, and ever so ready to lay at her pretty feet all that taste and wealth could furnish, as prodigally as if he were the Genius of the Lamp ; and yet, under the influence of this woman, this mysterious ‘ Birdie,’ he was rude enough to revert to such a trifle as the re-lining of the carriage !

‘ But as we live we learn,’ thought the girl ; and as her heart went forth to one who was far away, the hot tears blinded her tender eyes, and, like a child, she bowed her head on her pretty hands and wept—wept bitterly ; oh, how bitterly !—over the inexorable present and the past—the irrecoverable past ; while the false vows she had feebly called on heaven to hear, before the gloomy altar of St. George’s, seemed to rise up before her in letters of fire.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SISTERS.

‘ I WENT to the house of God, Gertrude, and I made faithless promises. The “ I will ” I uttered there was the most perilous one a woman can make ; and how have I kept it ?—in spirit at least. But *now*——’

There was some unuttered threat on the lips of Rosamund as she rushed into the dining-room where Gertrude was reading, as in the drawing-rooms and every other part of the house the carpets were rolled up, the gaseliers and furniture all encased in holland stuff, imparting the usual ghostly aspect to everything the mirrors reflected.

‘ My darling, what on earth is the matter ?’ exclaimed Gertrude, as the book fell from her hand. ‘ How pale you look !’

Then, somehow, when Rosamund felt the soft arms of her gentle sister go lovingly round her, half her troubles seemed

to slip away ; but the other half remained ; and Gertrude gazed with tender sorrow on the beauty of the sweet little face, wherein patience and pathos mingled with a great brilliance of expression.

If Rosamund had a sore, or rather a weak point in her character, it was pride.

With such a mother, she could scarcely have been without it ; and now, despite her habitual patience, her mouth, with all its cherub-like prettiness, was supercilious, and her little aristocratic head, with all its wealth of bright golden hair, was crested proudly up as she told her story to Gertrude, who, in alarm and bewilderment, heard for the first time of this mysterious woman.

‘ Who is this woman that he meets in secret, and to whom he gives presents ? Who is she ? Where does she come from ? What influence has she over him ? ’ said Rosamund.

‘ How can we tell ? ’ replied Gertrude sadly. ‘ She is some pensioner perhaps. ’

‘ People don’t give cases of jewels to pensioners, and meet them in tunnels and archways. I don’t believe she is anything of the kind, ’ continued the girl passionately.

‘ What do you think, then, Rosamund ? ’

‘ Think ! I scarcely know what to think. But I know what I fear. ’

‘ And what do you fear, darling ? ’

‘ That she is his—wife. ’

‘ Wife ! wife, Rosamund ! ’

‘ Yes. ’

‘ Then what are you ? ’

‘ Yes, what, in that case ? ’

‘ Rosamund, you are too absurd. ’

‘ How can we know but that he might have married beneath him—married some one of whom he is ashamed—pays for silence and all that ? Don’t we read of such things every day in Mrs. What’s-her-name’s novels ? ’

‘ But not in *Debrett*, as mamma would say. You are foolish, child. ’

‘Men will be men and must sow their wild oats,’ Lady Templeton had told Gertrude, with reference to the Derinzy affair and the keeper’s daughter at Ringwood Hall—that episode which had inspired her then with such disgust of the tall staff-colonel, and had so disastrous an effect upon her relations with Herbert Vere ; but could she, or would she—Lady Templeton—take so lenient a view of the ‘wild oats’ of the venerable baronet of Winklestoke, now that all her debts were paid, and her daughter so nobly dowered ?

It was difficult to say. As a woman of the world, Lady Templeton’s views were somewhat flexible, though she had a horror of scenes and scandals that bordered on quarrelling, and was fond of quoting a writer who says that, ‘certainly there is one merit in people of station, that they are not nearly so quarrelsome among each other as people of *no* station at all.’

‘Remember, Rosamund darling,’ said Gertrude, after a pause, ‘you brought, as mamma often says, your husband nothing.’

‘Nothing ! repeated Rosamund, her eyes flashing through their tears as she glanced at her face in an opposite mirror, and, with quick tremulous hands, threw back the masses of her brilliant hair, which had—as they had a way of doing—fallen loose.

She was now beginning to value her beauty and know the power of it, a perilous thing for the child-wife (for she was but little more) of an old man like Sir Ayling Aldwinkle.

‘Mistaken marriages happen every day in the week—even in London alone,’ said Gertrude gently.

‘But mine was no mistake,’ exclaimed Rosamund passionately ; ‘it was a crime—a crime—a crime, the effects of which may recoil on those who brought it about !’

Never had Gertrude seen her so excited, and she was cut to the heart.

‘Who could the “little charges” be of whom Sir Ayling spoke to this woman ?’

‘Yes, who ?’ repeated Rosamund, with quivering lips.

‘Did she look like a nurse?’

‘No; she is perfectly lady-like, even good style.’

‘And pretty?’

‘More handsome, I should say, than pretty.’

‘And young?’

‘No, about forty, apparently; but even she is too young for Sir Ayling’s years.’

Poor Rosamund half forgot herself.

‘It is altogether incomprehensible, said Gertrude; ‘but as it may be quite explainable, we must not speak of it to mamma, but wait and watch. We are surrounded by secrets of which we know nothing. Remember what Metastasio says :

‘If every one’s internal care
Were pity on his brow,
How many would our pity share
Who raise our envy now !
The fatal secret when revealed
Of every aching breast,
Would show that only when *concealed*
Their lot appears the best.”’

‘It may be so, but it is hard to console one’s self with an old rhyme,’ said Rosamund petulantly; and to Gertrude it seemed that the blight which Fate had cast upon her own love-affair was a small calamity as contrasted with the hopeless position of Rosamund. Though she never spoke of Vere now, she had not ceased to think of him.

His eye would never turn to hers again, or his voice fall on her ear as it had done, and doubtless had been falling on the ear of that luckless West Indian girl; but tantalising memory told her that it was all a man’s voice ought to be—clear and pleasantly intoned, strong and sweet and caressing; at least it had ever been caressing to her.

Among the many exciting details of the Jamaica revolt the tragedy at Mango Garden had found its way into the English papers, nor were exciting cartoons thereof omitted by the illustrated journals; so Gertrude was quite *au fait* with the whole conduct of Vere at the sack and destruction of the

Court-house at Morant Bay, the assassination of old Mr. Bel-
lingham, and the abduction of his daughter, together with
the ardour and precipitation with which Vere had attempted
her rescue, but had been baffled by the cunning of a savage
negro ; and Gertrude saw in fancy the chase—the fatal chase
up-hill—the catastrophe, and much more that never happened.

‘Well, well,’ she thought, ‘if he loved her—as even these
odious papers assert—he must have ceased to love me ; and
the assurance of this will surely make it easier to forget the
old love and the old regret, and the wrestle with life would
then be over.’

In one sense they were all over and done with ; yet in her
heart the girl shrank from Jocelyn Derinzy, and all the more
so when she considered that strangely-mated and unequally-
matched pair, little Rosamund and Sir Ayling Aldwinkle,
bound together for life—a short period now for the latter,
certainly ; but perhaps too long a period for the other to
drag her matrimonial chain, well gilded though it was.

That it was a chain Rosamund had not to learn. She had
felt the yoke even instinctively before it was put upon her ;
and the day was coming—or had come—when, with all his
assured vanity and old foppishness, Sir Ayling would make
the discovery for himself.

Unlike the marriages of those who wed and find they have
made a grand mistake in each other, the strange sense of
aversion, dissatisfaction, and disappointment had all been a
prevision with Rosamund.

Amid the splendour in which he had enshrined her, and
the luxuries with which he surrounded her, Sir Ayling, on
more than one occasion, found her shedding tears. Tears !
For whom did they flow ? For no one in reality, but simply
because the girl was fighting with a tie she loathed—affecting,
but scarcely even that, an attachment or gratitude she did
not feel.

But poor Rosamund, as yet, had failed in no point of
wifely duty ; in no neglect of her position as a *grande dame*,
as mistress of a large household, and the custodian of her

husband's honour ; though she strove to forget herself—to kiss her pretty little childlike hand when Sir Ayling Aldwinkle went simpering forth, twiddling his eyeglass, to mount his quiet old nag, and to smile when he came back from his club, the Row, or the House ; and she did by him all her 'duty,' till, in thought, she loathed and detested the word, and prayed that heaven in its goodness might accord her something else.

In her marriage *she* had made no mistake, as she never doubted what it would prove. Sir Ayling Aldwinkle's heart was old and worn ; and hers, though in the flush of youth, was—so far as he was concerned—a heart of ice ; and he now took all its iciness with an amount of jauntiness that was provoking even to her indifference, especially when she looked back to the love she had borne Kyrle Desborough—the love that had neither been asked of nor offered to her ; and to that episode in the conservatory, the recollection of which always gave her an emotion of the deepest annoyance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'BIRDIE.'

YOUNG though she was—barely nineteen—Rosamund had already reached 'that point in life when,' according to Miss Mulock, 'we cease to be afraid of evil tidings, since nothing is likely to happen to us beyond what *has* happened.'

She thought she had become utterly indifferent to everything, yet the sudden advent of 'Birdie' was a shock to her, nor was the affair likely to pass soon away.

Returning one day from a four-o'clock drive in the then empty Row, she asked if Sir Ayling had returned from Westminster, whither he had gone 'on county matters.'

'No,' replied the servant ; 'but a lady is waiting for him in the library.'

'A lady—who ?'

'She would give neither name nor card, my lady.'

'Strange !' said Rosamund ; and as some vague suspicion flashed upon her, she went straight to the library, and found herself face to face with 'Birdie.'

The quick eye of Rosamund saw the unknown had on a necklet, with pendant locket and bracelets of gold and blue enamel—the identical suite, no doubt, so recently given in the adjacent gardens ; and, to make matters more startling, on the locket were the letters 'A. A.' in a bold monogram.

There was something in the wearer's face that forbade scrutiny ; it was not as yet defiant, but rather calm and sad in expression.

'Woman, who are you, pray ?' asked Rosamund, without responding to the bow with which the visitor arose and greeted her.

'I am not wont to answer questions asked in such a tone,' was the gentle yet haughty reply.

'Pardon me if I spoke harshly ; but what are you ?'

'What fate has made me.'

'And what may that be ?'

'Nearer to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle than you, who treat me thus haughtily.'

'Nearer than I ?'

'Yes,' replied the other, controlling by her teeth the quivering of her nether lip.

'Nearer than I—his wife ?' queried Rosamund.

'Yes.'

'You are mad !'

'I am *not* mad, Lady Aldwinkle,' replied the other calmly.

'Oh, you call me that, at all events ; but may I ask what is your secret business here ?'

'That is my affair.'

'But with my husband ?'

'Yes.'

'This is gross insolence ; the servants shall expel you—the police look after you.'

At these threats the woman's eyes sparkled, her nostrils

quivered, and her pale cheek flushed, making her look really bright and handsome in her defiant spirit.

‘You dare not!’ she exclaimed.

‘Dare not!’

‘No, even you, girl, dare not.’

‘This is too much. You shall leave this house instantly, and beware how you ever enter it again. Secret meetings in parks and gardens are one style of impropriety, but for creatures of your class to come here is insolence intolerable. Begone, instantly, lest worse come of it!’

The woman’s fine eyes flashed through the sudden tears that started into them.

‘I will spare myself more humiliation and you further annoyance or the chance of a scene for the *present*, young lady,’ said she, moving towards the door; ‘but my time may come yet.’

Rosamund rang the bell, and the hall-porter ushered the stranger out, receiving at the same time orders that he was ‘never to admit that person again.’

The whole situation was new to Rosamund; it seemed bad form, low, intriguing—she knew not what; while she had a keen sense of being mortified and insulted, with a great longing to have ‘a good cry’ over it, but not a tear would come.

Was this unexpected cross put upon her as a punishment for permitting her thoughts to stray after Kyrle Desborough? and was this but the beginning of some dark ending? For people heard of such strange events in all classes of society now.

A vague wish that her brother, the young lord who was then in the playing fields at Eton, were twice his present age, that he might probe this secret and protect her, occurred to Rosamund; but, save Gertrude, she had no refuge, and shrank from communion with her mother.

For her religion was no refuge; brought up as she had been, she was almost callously indifferent to all connected with it. She said her prayers, certainly, and read her Bible, as her governess had taught her that it was necessary to do

these things ; but she did so by rote and rule in the most formal and unreflecting manner.

The tall footmen (carefully matched), with their plush breeches, canes, and bouquets, were, like the velvet hassocks she knelt on, quite as much a part and parcel of the whole thing as the said prayers and Bible reading. She 'went in' for matins and evensong, ritual and intoned services ; but beyond all these poor Rosamund's ideas on religious subjects were rather hazy ; but that they were so was not her fault, but the fault of her family and the circle in which she moved.

Yet times there were when a wild, vague yearning of a sense and wish for something better and purer and more satisfying to her spirit came into the heart of the girl.

The hour was late, and it was not until after she had returned from an evening musical party that she had an opportunity of questioning Sir Ayling on the subject of his visitor.

Her rich dress had been thrown aside, her diamonds all deposited in their velvet cases by Parker, her maid, and charming indeed the girl looked in a dressing-robe of light-blue silk, with delicate lace trimmings, and her golden hair drawn into a thick coil.

'Shall I brush out your hair, my lady?' asked the maid, pausing with a large ivory brush in her hand.

'No, thanks, Parker ; I want nothing more,' said the girl wearily. 'Here comes Sir Ayling. Good-night.'

The baronet, in a rich dressing-gown girt with a silk tasselled cord, came in with his little skip, and, apologising for his protracted absence, was about to kiss her cheek, when Rosamund interposed her quick little hand, and said quietly :

'Stop, Sir Ayling, till you answer a question I have to ask.'

'And this question, my darling, is——'

'Who *is* Birdie?'

Sir Ayling started and changed colour, or rather grew paler than was his wont, for his complexion was of that colourless grey peculiar to his years. Surprise, indignation, and alarm were all visible by turns in the thin, wrinkled face, together

with a comical kind of twinkle—but for a moment only, as the situation seemed a grave one—a twinkle, as if he rather relished, or did not dislike, the idea of being suspected of gallantry, of being deemed 'a gay dog' at his years ; but that was a fleeting emotion, as Rosamund steadily repeated her question.

'I do not know any such person,' he replied doggedly.

'Your face confesses that you do, Sir Ayling ; and I beg that you will not condescend to the meanness of denial.'

'Well, who informed you of the existence of such a person ?' he asked haughtily.

'Your own lips in the first place, herself in the second.'

'My own lips !' said Sir Ayling, with some alarm ; 'do I mutter in my sleep ? And herself, you say ?'

'Herself ; she to whom you gave the suit of jewels in the garden.'

'I have then been spied upon !' exclaimed Sir Ayling, with indignation, as the intolerable and degrading idea of having been watched, by a detective, perhaps, flashed upon his mind.

'Who is this strange woman who meets and visits you openly or secretly, as suits herself apparently ?'

'If she visits me openly it is evident, then, that she has nothing to conceal.'

'But you, less brazen than her, have, I presume ?'

'Allow me to suggest, Lady Aldwinkle——'

'I will have no suggestions !' cried Rosamund impetuously, as she stamped her little foot.

'As you will ; then——'

'What then ?'

'I shall be silent.'

'What if I make it a public scandal ?'

'Better not,' said he, with an air of menace she had never before seen him assume, while his eyes sparkled, and his long, thin, aristocratic nose seemed to become longer and thinner than ever.

'By what right,' he said, after a pause, 'do you pry into my affairs, Lady Aldwinkle ?'

‘By what right, Sir Ayling, have you secrets and secret meetings with women unknown to me?’

‘Upon my honour, Lady Aldwinkle——’

‘Your honour!’ was the contemptuous interruption of the indignant girl. And so they separated, she with her teeth clenched beneath her firm and closed lips.

Though she had ever been cold, passive, and too plainly indifferent to all his kindness and attention, never before had there been aught approaching to anything so unseemly as the scene of that night.

Poor old Sir Ayling! whatever his relations with Birdie might be, or might have been, or whatever her undue influence over him, he was exceedingly loth to think that there was quite a breach between himself and Rosamund; and thus next morning he laid his thin hand caressingly upon her rich golden hair. Ere he could speak she shrugged her shoulders, and said peevishly :

‘I do wish you wouldn’t bother.’

It was the first time she had ever spoken thus; and he *did* feel put out.

‘Rosamund!’ said he.

‘Why do you fidget me?’ she added apologetically, in a lady-like if not a wife-like spirit, for most worrying to the girl were those attentions she had no wish for.

It would be better, she thought, to lament the dead, the vanished touch, and the stilled voice the poet sings of, than be compelled to endure the caresses of one who was more than ever repugnant to her now.

From this time forward, either at Portland Place, at Winklestoke, or elsewhere, the current of matrimonial life did not flow so smoothly with this ill-matched pair as it had done before the advent of ‘Birdie.’

There were grave doubts in the mind of Rosamund concerning her husband and this unknown, who had been daring enough to threaten her in her own house, that though silent for the present, a time to be otherwise would come anon; and these doubts, for reasons of his own, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle

was too proud, apparently, or too defiant, to dispel by any explanation ; so in greater coldness of bearing and caprice of manner they passed the time, their intercourse in society to all appearance unchanged, though they had their own secret thoughts and bitternesses.

With those of Rosamund were mingled sometimes angry visions of revenging herself in some way—she scarcely knew how, for the heart of the girl was so pure and innocent.

The winter passed away at Winklestoke and Ringwood Hall, the London season of another year drew nigh, and once more the West End became 'a hotbed of folly and fashion.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

MORE CAUSE FOR THOUGHT.

DESPITE the splendours of Winklestoke and of Portland Place, with gay company, servants, equipages, dress, and all that wealth could surround her with, Rosamund was a lonely girl—she was not a woman yet.

'All things come alike to all,' she had heard a popular preacher urge one day again and again on his hearers ; and Rosamund marvelled what the words meant. Were all lives like hers ?

To the old bachelor baronet she was a wife altogether beyond his ken or calculation. Aware of the vast disparity in their years, he had feared—notwithstanding all that he had done in a monetary way for Lady Templeton—that Rosamund might have proved capricious, might have nagged and sulked at him ; but he failed to understand how or why a creature who was once so light and joyous had become passive, listless, lifeless, and heedless of him and all the world now—only showing fire and animation once, on the occasion just referred to.

Sir Ayling had an angry consciousness that he seldom appeared to the best advantage when by the side of her he wished most to please. When he rode or drove with her he

was often cross—very cross—she proved so attractive in the eyes of men, and then he felt himself somewhat of an old fool.

Yet for her, more than all the world, was it that he came forth, curled, padded, and stayed by the hands of his model valet, with faultless gloves and glazed boots. With all these accessories, nevertheless, Time went rigorously on. Wrinkles had replaced dimples, as they always do, and the bald circle on the crown of his head was long since past concealment or ‘dodging’ now, and he reviled in his heart jolly Admiral Weatherly when, in Rosamund’s hearing, that ill-bred seaman spoke of ‘we old fellows, who can remember so and so,’ referring to some event of thirty years before she was even in her berceauette.

She, on her part, was now realising to the full all the dire convictions that had come on her when the alliance was first proposed to her by Lady Templeton ; and more than these, for, from the moment that she had suspicions of Sir Ayling and his mysterious friend, she deemed but too readily that she had a right to dislike the husband whom she had never loved and never respected, notwithstanding all that he lavished upon her ; and there was between them a distinct apple of discord now that did not exist before, and unpleasant remarks sometimes passed between them.

Thus, one day, when idling dreamily at the piano, playing the accompaniment of a song in which Desborough was wont to accompany her, and in which now memory and fancy brought distinctly back the notes of his voice, she started up in haste on seeing her husband’s face in the opposite mirror, wearing somewhat of a sardonic expression.

‘As usual,’ said he ‘sad—*triste*. Can I do anything to rouse you ?’

‘Nothing,’ said she pettishly ; ‘I want nothing.’

‘But to be let alone—alone to mope.’

‘If you please, Sir Ayling.’

‘How studiously you call me *Sir* Ayling !’

‘Well, it is your name, is it not ?’

‘Its formality sounds unkind between us, Rosamund. I fear we shall never win the Dunmow flitch of bacon.’

‘Few married couples do,’ replied the girl, with her proud lip curling; ‘there are so many fools in this world.’

‘I don’t quite see the drift of your remark; but I hope you think every one should marry.’

‘So they should, if possible; and,’ she added, with face half averted, ‘more than ever, if possible, marry the right person.’

‘Have *you* not got the right person?’ asked Sir Ayling quietly, but with a gloom in his eye.

‘I have not said so,’ replied the girl wearily.

‘Surely you don’t think so,’ he urged.

‘My thoughts are my own,’ replied Rosamund, almost angrily, as she turned once more to the piano.

By the mere force of circumstances and her surroundings, the luckless girl was induced to brood morbidly over the idea of Kyrle Desborough as the man who, under more propitious auspices, might and should have been her husband; and at times there was something of fanaticism in the tenacity with which she clung to it, thus fencing herself against temptations close at hand.

Had she partially loved, or even respected, the husband to whom her mother had tied her, she might—especially had she been a religious girl—have prayed for strength to regard Desborough as something now far beyond her reach; but she never did, and under the present circumstances was less likely to do so.

Yet times there were that Rosamund, when alone and full of thought, would colour with anger—anger at herself, at her own weakness and infirmity of purpose in nursing, amid her splendid surroundings, a secret fancy for this handsome and heedless officer, who was now so far away, and whom neither her acknowledged beauty, nor her rank as the daughter of a peer, could lure to her feet.

A little gleam of sunshine came into the fancied gloom that surrounded her, and her listlessness received a fillip from a

very simple circumstance. Riding in the Row one day, attended by her groom only, she came suddenly upon a soldier of the Eighth, 'the Eighth or King's.'

The man was leaning against the iron railing, evidently surveying the novel scene with interest ; but he looked wan and thin, though evidently tanned and bronzed by a tropical sun. She checked her horse, drew a little way out of the careering throng, and desired the groom to bring the soldier to her.

Tom Kenny—for he was no other than our friend the marksman—came forward with much surprise expressed in his somewhat wasted face, saluted and came to attention, curious to know what so beautiful a lady had to say to him.

'I see that you belong to the Eighth or King's,' said Rosamund.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'And have been abroad ?'

'Yes ; I have just come home from the West Indies. I was sent home invalided in poor health.'

'Ah, it is a bad climate, then, Jamaica ?'

'Not at all, my lady ; but the rum—at least, as we got it—is precious bad, and I never could abide sangaree. Moreover, I was wounded in the leg, and the scar gangrened after on the march.'

'When—wounded—where ?' she asked anxiously.

'When Mr. Vere—Captain Vere as he is now, my lady—opened so skilfully an enfilading fire on those murdering niggers at Morant Bay.'

'Was Captain Desborough there ?'

'No, ma'am ; he was at Up Park Camp, miles away, that night. He is the captain of my company, and there ain't a better officer in the Queen's service'

'And you left the West Indies——'

'Only six weeks ago, ma'am, for Fort Pitt ; but they might as well have let me come home with my comrades, who are all sailing on the sea by this time, as Captain Desborough's command is ordered back to join the battalion.'

‘And when are they expected to land?’

‘That I can scarcely tell you, ma’am, but they will all be soon in old England again.’

Greatly to poor Tom’s surprise, she slipped a sovereign into his hand, and bowing her handsome head in reply to his profound salute, rode off. This soldier had seen, and doubtless spoken with, Kyrle Desborough since *she* had; hence the meeting was full of interest to her.

Coming home! Kyrle Desborough was coming home, and she thought with mingled fear and joy that she would be sure to meet him in the same houses and places where she met him before.

‘Oh, I must not—must not see him. The wife of Sir Ayling, I have striven to do my duty as such,’ she whispered to herself; ‘and know that to love another—even when him I cannot love—is a sin of the heart; so Kyrle I must avoid; and, thank heaven, the season is over, and ere he returns we shall have left London.’

But these half-uttered resolutions and intentions were all mere sophistry and apologies to propriety, for even while forming them in words she was brooding with tremulous joy over the news she had so suddenly received.

She galloped home, hurried away to her own room, and declining the assistance of Parker, threw off her riding habit, and gave way to the tumult of her thoughts.

‘Oh, I am married, I am married now! I cannot, I ought not to go on thinking of him as no righteous married woman can ever think of another not her husband. O God, help me!’ she cried, and yet half feared her poor timid cry might be heard.

So, by duty or by chance, Kyrle Desborough was coming back. ‘Is anything chance? Does our own *will* sooner or later accomplish for us what we desire?’

Great as the world is, it is a small place in some respects, and people turn up and meet each other unexpectedly by the most singular coincidences and freaks of chance. Thus Rosamund had never been without a wild hope, desire, cer-

tainty, what you will, that again she should meet Kyrle Desborough—whether married or single, she knew not ; only that there was in her heart the blind desperate certainty that they must somehow or somewhere meet again, and now the time was coming.

Then her former thoughts of duty, doubt, propriety, and fear occurred to her, and she asked of herself to what end was all this tumult in her breast. Sir Ayling was quite at a loss to account for the capricious state of the girl's spirits that evening, and his surprise took the form of irritation ; and when she was running her fingers over the keys of the piano, and singing softly the words of 'Auld Robin Gray,' he asked sharply why the deuce she always played *that* vulgar Scotch song, and who the devil was the Jemmie it was such a sin to think about ? It should be borne in mind that Rosamund had not accorded to her a *chance* of obliterating, or even of weakening, the strong fancy she had conceived for Kyrle Desborough.

Had a lover nearer her own years been permitted to address her, had her husband been more in accordance with her age and ideas, even though chosen by match-making Lady Templeton, the fancy might, nay, most probably would, have died out : but thrust back upon herself as the girl's heart was, with all its joyous and youthful impulses, there the fancy was, and there it remained.

But eccentric though some may deem it, it was, as yet, her safeguard ; for the circle in which she moved, the girl-wife of an old man like Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, was deemed fair game for every *roué* in the Household Brigades or out of them.

Yet to do Rosamund justice, we must admit that she was honestly glad when they took their departure for Winklestoke, where she felt she would be safe from temptation and that turbulence of spirit which meeting Desborough in society would be sure to occasion her, as the return of Vere was certain to do in the heart of Gertrude.

In the vanity of Sir Ayling's mind it never occurred to him

to think, 'I have been selfish, unjust, and have done this young girl a great wrong in marrying her, and blighting her future life.'

And, as yet, he had never had occasion to find fault with her, save for her listless indifference whenever they were alone. Amid all this he was very proud of her. Rosamuud might have squandered thousands had she chosen to do so ; but this she did not, though her *forte* was the graceful reception of company. She was still in her girlhood, yet she—through indifference, and really a half-dislike of society—had attained, as Lady Aldwinkle, an amount of self-possession that matrons of maturer years seldom possess, and had the happy power of putting all at ease to perfection.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.'

THE brief but fierce excitement of the negro-insurrection over, time seemed to pass slowly in Jamaica ; but passed nevertheless inexorably there, as elsewhere, and much patrol duty succeeded the more active operations, the courts-martial, and the executions, which excited such a *furore* among certain classes in England.

Autumn, winter, spring, and summer, as we term them in Europe, had come and gone unmarked in that region of eternal summer, save as the dry and rainy seasons, or the months of hurricane ; but to Vere—a captain now—the months had seemed as years, in his longing to leave the Antilles ; and the time came at last, and in the summer of old England, when he knew the chestnuts would be in flower and the roses putting forth their sweetest buds. But prior to that event others occurred that were of considerable interest to him.

On a night in the end of November, during the rainy season, a night Vere never forgot—when the streets of Kingston were flooded by streams rushing down from the

mountains, and around the barracks at Up Park Camp the floods were foaming and frothing in the highways and byeways, eddying deep in hollows, and sweeping away stones, palings, and even trees, inducing people, as Desborough said, to put their faith in St. Swithin, the patron of golosh and umbrella makers—the mail from England was delivered at head-quarters, and therewith came a letter of importance to Herbert Vere, who, in his haste—news from home is ever dear to those so far away—tore it open without looking at the address.

‘From Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, of Gray’s Inn!’ he exclaimed; ‘now what on earth do these reptiles write to me about?’

‘Something nasty, you may be sure,’ replied Kyrle Desborough; ‘the sight of a lawyer’s letter always gives me a turn. But renew your priming before you look at it,’ added Kyrle, pushing the decanter towards his friend, whose startled expression of face, as his eyes ran over the epistle, speedily attracted his attention and roused his curiosity, for he could remember the disappointment and disgust the last communication from these legal gentlemen occasioned to Vere.

‘We have the honour and the pleasure of acquainting you of your sudden accession to the baronetcy of your late cousin, Sir John—successor of Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, of whose lamented decease at Mentone we had to inform you when quartered at Aldershot. We have now to congratulate you most warmly on your succession to the family title. Your cousin, who, you are aware, was unmarried, perished suddenly in the manner described in the accompanying newspaper cutting, which we beg to enclose.

‘We have the additional pleasure of informing you that we have discovered there is another will of the late Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, dated at Mentone, and subsequent to that which had the unfortunate codicil in favour of the old housekeeper, by which the entire estates are devised to you. We always thought something of this kind would come to pass; and with the hope of being still continued as agents

of the family, we have the honour to be, dear Sir Herbert,' etc.

'I congratulate you, my boy, from the bottom of my heart I do!' exclaimed the hearty voice of Kyrle, as his strong hand grasped that of his friend.

Quincey Hall, a baronetcy, and a magnificent fortune ! It was a sudden change to find one's self possessed of all these and all that was comprehended therein, and within the space of a few minutes ; but Vere took the matter quietly.

He remembered how his hopes with Gertrude Templeton had been so sorely crushed on the last occasion he saw the legal caligraphy of Messrs. Wolfe, Fox & Graball, and the thought of that tempered even his satisfaction now. The baronetcy would no doubt appear but small promotion to the Viscountess Derinzy, but on that subject he never reflected. He had but one idea—the joy it would have given to the generous and impulsive girl who had loved him with all her heart when he was but a mere regimental officer, with only a few hundreds per annum in addition to his pay.

'A title—a baronetcy—it is a pleasant thing, by Jove !'

'So certain was I that John Vere would marry and have a brood of little ones, that I never gave it a thought.'

'And the dirty acres ?'

'Worth some twelve thousand per annum.'

'I congratulate you on both !'

'Both what, Kyrle ?' asked Vere absently.

'Title and money.'

'Too late, in one way,' said Vere with a bitter laugh.

'Don't say so, if it is Lady Derinzy you are thinking of.'

'I was not thinking of her, far from it ; but speaking of her reminds me that I once heard her mother remark contemptuously, "that there were no such sticklers for precedence and place as your little knights and baronets."'

'You will be sending in your papers, quitting the old corps now, I suppose ?'

'Far from it ; I have the greater incentive to remain. Quit the Eighth or King's ! The last act in the world I

should think of doing, yet awhile at least ; and only think of the thousand things this money will enable me to do for the men, their wives and children. Egad, they shall have a feast on Christmas-day that will form part of the regimental history.'

'Well, we will begin the festivities by having a deep drink of the sparkling at mess to-night.'

'That we will ; but I am forgetting poor John Vere's accident ; by Jove, drowned in the hunting-field !'

It would seem that after a few hours run with the county pack, during which the stag had twice crossed a swollen stream, causing the entire field to scatter on the wrong side of it, he made for a deep pool, into which he was pursued by some of the dogs, while others loudly gave tongue by the margin of it.

When Sir John Vere came up at a rasping pace he saw that two of the best hounds in the pack—animals that were unequalled for their union of fine scent, speed and perseverance—were hanging on to the beast, one by an ear, the other by the flank, surrounded by blood and foam, in the deepest part of the pool—an old quarry—when it was certain that all three would drown, as the hounds would never relax their grip.

Throwing off his hunting-coat, amid the cheers of the field, he plunged boldly into the flood, though it was icy cold, and strove to disengage the dogs by striking at them with the shank of his whip ; but it is well known that a stag is most dangerous when in the water, and the one in question—a full-grown animal, four feet in height, the strongest and captain of a herd—gave Sir John a butt so furious with his horns that the young baronet sank, stunned and never came to the surface again alive ; the body had to be dragged for ; and in this singular manner the owner of Quincey Hall perished.

A rash wild fellow at all times, he had been expelled from one of the upper forms at Eton for some mad prank, of which the head-master failed to see the fun or propriety.

Interested, like all young Britons, in field sports (after

Vere’s round of congratulations), the mess found a staple subject for conversation in this singular and tragic anecdote of the hunting-field ; but as the night wore on and the wine circulated, on the suggestion of Toby Finch, the youngsters proposed to give Vere, who was their prime favourite, a marked ovation after the colonel and some of the ‘oldsters’ had retired ; so true it is that it is often ‘the dashing young captain rather than the middle-aged colonel who gives the tone to the youngsters of a mess.’

Reviving for the time a good though old-fashioned custom each who was present pledged Vere in a bumper of champagne, which he drained to show the satisfaction felt at his good fortune ; and all about the poor fellow drowned in the pool was no more remembered than the last year’s snow, unless by Vere himself ; and the chief event of the evening was of course when Kyrle, with a heart as full as his glass, rose to propose his health, and every voice was hushed as he did so.

Kyrle Desborough spoke of twelve years he had spent in the regiment himself—twelve years, during which it had been to him a happy, if peripatetic, home ; he spoke of the many good fellows he had seen come into it and leave it—some for homes that were narrow and bloody ones in Central India some expiring on the bed of sickness, and buried in the jungles by the Jumna and the Indus or elsewhere ; but *never* had he met with one who was more beloved for all gentleness and so many good qualities as Herbert Vere, whom he deemed the soul of the corps, a tiptop fellow, who had led the van in every regimental undertaking, from the cricket-field to the battle-field, from riding across country to pulling an oar ; for there was devilish little he hadn’t done and hadn’t done well, from keeping his wicket at Rugby to planting a scaling-ladder against the walls of Delhi, and from tooling a drag round the Serpentine to climbing the Matterhorn ; so, in the name of the Eighth or King’s, he begged to propose his health, with long life and prosperity, etc.

It was just the kind of speech suited to the hour, his hearers,

and their present mood ; they applauded it to the echo, got on the table, to the serious damage of much crystal, to drink the toast, with 'Highland honours,' at the suggestion of the Scotch doctor, little Capsicum ; and, not content with singing the inevitable.

'For he's a jolly good fellow.
And so say all of us,'

some were for having the band hooked out of their beds, to the end that they might carry him round the barrack square (though the last bugle had pealed its farewell blast four hours before) to the notes of the regimental quickstep, though the rain was yet pouring as it only pours in the Antilles.

After Vere had replied in a few well-chosen sentences, the youngsters began the clamour again, with 'One cheer more,' and another, till the noise was heard over all Up Park barracks, and the soldiers lay muttering in their beds, wondering 'what the deuce it was all about ;' but the mess were in a cheering mania, and after one 'cheeky' sub had—'happy thought!'—proposed and obtained 'Three cheers for the future Lady Vere !' the noise only subsided when the subject thereof withdrew to his solitary quarters, and to think and ponder alone over all that was now and all that might have been ; for it was evident that so long as he was in Jamaica, and under local influences, Vere would be a man of one thought, and that a sad one.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'ALL IS NOT FALSE THAT SEEMS AT FIRST A LIE.'

AT the mess-table Vere had smiled sardonically at the lusty cheer young 'cheeky' had evoked for Lady Vere.

Lady Vere.

There should be none, he thought. If he left the Eighth—and he did not see his way to that step as yet—he would settle down into a quiet covert-shooting, fox-hunting, cow-

breeding old country squire—a delightful contrast to the present lotus-eating life in the Antilles—a thorough old bachelor.

But then he remembered his uncle, Sir Joseph, was a thorough one, whose life was a burden to himself and every one else he came in contact with—a man with whom petty household annoyances became events of vast importance; who was always suspicious that his flannels were not properly aired; that his port however fine the vintage, was cloudy, or that he only got liquors to drink that were too bad for the servants' hall; that when the time came for clean sheets he was ever in terror of damp and ague, rheumatism and the devil himself!

No—no—*no*: he could never be the miserable, complaining old creature uncle Joe, had been—uncle Joe, who ended by marrying his housekeeper.

Vere, anyway, was fast learning that the best *rôle* in life is to take everything coolly; hence he felt no elation. Recent events—the affair of Gertrude Templeton, and the bitter affront she had put upon him, the latter grief caused by the tragedy at Mango Garden—had rather taken the spirit out of Herbert Vere; thus he accepted the advent of rank and fortune quietly—so much so, and with so little thought of the future, that he was surprised at himself.

Now the same mail which had brought Vere his important missive from the harpies at Gray's Inn had a letter for Toby Finch from his sister—a letter some passages in which referred to Vere, and though they puzzled the young subaltern much, threw a light on a matter that had hitherto been obscure to the former, to whose quarters he at once betook himself.

'I have some news for you, Vere,' said he.

'What! an accession to a peerage—called to the Upper House, eh, Toby?'

'Well—neither; but something concerning you, from Sophy.'

'And who on earth *is* Sophy?'

‘My sister, who was one of Lady Aldwinkle’s bridesmaids.’

‘And she writes concerning me?’ asked Vere, becoming a little interested.

‘Yes, and her sister Gertrude, and that solemn tall fellow on the staff at Aldershot, Derinzy.’

‘Well,’ said Vere, coldly and rather grimly.

‘She seems to explain something that had happened—something that was unknown to you ; but here is her letter—read for yourself.’

Vere took the girl’s letter ; its caligraphy was pleasing, clear, bold, yet neat and ladylike, with a dash and character all its own, and larger than one would have thought a hand so tiny as Sophy’s could have produced.

After telling about where she had been and whom she had seen and so forth, incidentally, when mentioning the family at Ringwood Hall, she briefly narrated in a gossipy way the whole affair of Derinzy, and the *mistake* concerning the letter he had dropped—the letter of Phœbe Bagshaw, written under the belief that the gallant colonel was *Vere*, and how hence it was that the Templetons so studiously ignored the presence of the latter on that morning when the troops left Farnborough. The cold hearty stare, the cut direct was thus explained ; but, thought Vere, what does it all matter now ?

Not a jot !

‘She knew afterwards that I was innocent, Toby,’ said he, ‘and yet she married him, the man who was guilty of a doubly dishonourable action.’

‘But he is a viscount ; such is life !’

‘It is curious—this matter, Toby ; I mean that your sister should write about it.’

‘Not at all, knowing that you and I are such friends. No doubt the girls have had the affair talked over among themselves, and hence Sophy’s explanation, meant, no doubt, for your ears.’

‘It is kind of her ; but it matters now little to me.’

‘A despicable game that was of Derinzy’s.’

‘By Jove, Toby, I had quite forgotten all about it,’ said Vere, ‘and never thought of connecting it with the manner in which I was treated by Gertude Templeton. By the way, your sister does not mention her as Lady Derinzy.’

‘Then you have not read Sophy’s letter attentively. Don’t you see by the postscript that her ladyship has been fully occupied of late?’

‘In what way?’

‘In producing an heir to the title,’ said Finch, laughing; ‘I know now, Vere, that it will neither grieve nor astonish you.’

‘I have seen so much of life, Toby,’ replied Vere, ‘that I do not think anything would astonish me. I am certainly gratified to learn that Gertrude has been undeceived concerning me; but wonder how such a girl could be brought to accept such a husband.’

And as he spoke, perhaps without apparent pique, jealousy, or irritation, Vere’s memory recalled the *insouciance*, the general bearing of Derinzy—his cultivated indolence and listlessness, as if it was too much trouble to think or breathe; his fishy blue eyes, the repellent expression of which was suggestive of the *malocchio*; and he remembered, too, the calm defiant insolence of the colonel when he taxed him with his ungentlemanly conduct on that morning in his quarters at Aldershot.

‘And it is of such fellows as this our *hereditary* legislators are made,’ thought Vere; ‘and Gertrude is married to him. Well,’ he added mentally for the hundredth time, ‘to me it is nothing; there are as good fish in the sea—and so forth.’

The love he had won at Mango Garden, and the awful sequel to that love, had made Vere a sadder and a wiser man, and had obliterated nearly all memory of the treatment to which Lady Templeton and her daughter had subjected him; yet he could not help wishing the latter a better fate than being the wife of Jocelyn Derinzy.

‘Why should I waste a thought on her?’ said he to Kyrle Desborough.

'Ah, why indeed? unless it be that you are yet weak in that quarter, and can't help it, and are trying to think, as Southey has it,

"All is not false that seems at first a lie."'

'I only hope that she may be happy, and that Derinzy will make her a good husband. I don't believe the fellow possibly can, though.'

'And then she will be sure to tire of him in a season or so.'

'Well, we are going home soon.'

'No association of ideas, I hope!'

'Kyrle, do you want your head punched?'

'Thanks, no; but what were you about to say?'

'That, as we are going home soon, I may as well get used to thinking of her as Lady Derinzy, as a married woman—for we may meet, are pretty sure to do so—as one belonging to another; one on whom my thoughts, if such occur, may never more rest. So, *vive la bagatelle!* whether we meet or not. What are the odds?'

'So long as you are happy. It is the right spirit in which to take the whole situation,' said Kyrle Desborough cheerily.

'And while on this subject, to me it seems a marvel that you never think with regret of little Rosamund. You might have married her, you know.'

'If she would have had me,' laughed Kyrle, twirling his heavy moustache.

'Had you? The girl was undisguisedly fond of you.'

'I dare say I should have made a good average husband.'

'You can't be that to her now.'

'No, thank heaven; for matrimony, Sir Herbert Vere, is not my *rôle*.'

'Nor mine now,' said Vere.

'So you say, and perhaps think; but concerning your future, it is impossible to foresee what is in store for you.'

'True; Fate is as common to all as that the future is hidden from all,' said Vere thoughtfully.

So it was to be England once again. The farewell sermon

to the departing troops had been preached at Up Park Camp ; the farewell ball had been given at Admiral's Pen—a ball by the governor, whose entertainments, as the representative of majesty, answer to the Drawing-rooms of royalty, and cause a fever of anxiety, emulation, and excitement in the island : the farewell dinner at the mess had passed away ; the transport *Bannockburn* again lay within the palisades of Kingston Harbour with the blue-peter fluttering at the fore, and the morning of departure came.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE sound of the morning drum woke Herbert Vere from a dream, which he found to have been of Gertrude Templeton, and their meeting by the stile—a dream born doubtless of association of ideas ; for was he not going home—home to old England once more ?

He sprang up to dress, and could hear the merry voices of the soldiers already gathering, accoutred and in marching order, in the barrack square ; and so lately had he retired to bed, that he scarcely seemed to have closed his eyes at all, and memories of many a departure and embarkation came mingling to memory.

It seemed but yesterday when he was quitting Bengal ; and he remembered the farewell sermon in the cantonment church, the punkahs swaying to and fro overhead, alternately showing and concealing the preacher, while the birds in scores twittered about in the roof and at the open windows.

During the small hours of the morning he had been sensible of the 'row' made by certain subs, who, after the ball, had never been to bed nor taken off their uniforms, but had filled up the intervening time by making a 'booby trap' for one of their number, and teasing Toby Finch : for Toby was a good-natured fellow, who, at Aldershot and elsewhere, had permitted his brother youngsters to 'draw' him in his hut at night ; to sentry-box him—a pitiful joke, which consists in

placing the box close to the victim's door, and shouting 'Fire!' or so forth, that he may rush into it as into a trap; by 'making hay' in his room—which consists in pulling everything to pieces; till even Toby at last turned on them, cudgelled some one, and fairly cut down another with his sword, after which he had peace.

So, amid the adjacent disturbances and shouts of laughter, no wonder it was that Vere's short nap should have been a species of trance, in which, between sleeping and waking, his mind wandered away to other scenes and other forms and faces.

The garrison adjutant and other officials came galloping on the ground, and the parade was speedily formed. Home was the word in every heart and on every lip, and all Kyrle Desborough's men looked bright and cheerful, as the staff remarked.

'Oh, it is nothing to us,' said Kyrle Desborough; 'we of the Eighth are just the kind of fellows who can dance or sit up to any hour of the night, and be up as fresh as daisies at any hour the drum may beat in the morning.'

All the officers seemed very jolly—the effects of the governor's ball, champagne, round-dancing, and unlimited flirtation were still rather apparent in the hazy bearing of some, especially in Tom Prior, who tried laboriously to wheel his company into line by the pivot-flank.

'What the deuce are you about, Prior?' asked Desborough angrily.

'Excuse me,' said Prior, rapidly rectifying his mistake; 'I am not such a fool as I seem.'

'I confess appearances are against you; and you, Finch, look sharp, in proving your company, and try to forget all about her.'

'Her—who?'

'Why, the Creole girl you were so maudlin about at two this morning—'

' "To visit far Jamaica's shore,
Had no kind angel deigned to move you,

These laughing eyes had laughed no more,
Nor Yarra lived to thank and love you.”

It was a merry parade, and a merrier march, when, preceded by the band of a West Indian regiment, the companies of the Eighth, followed by a ringing cheer from the troops in garrison, quitted Up Park Camp, and took their downward way towards Kingston Harbour, accompanied by crowds of capering darkies, performing around them a species of *mazourka d'extase*, either inspired by the crashing music and the drums, or pleasure to get rid of some of the ‘buckra soldiers’ by any means.

All were soon on board, and already the *Bannockburn* was getting up her steam.

It seemed but as yesterday since Vere had stood upon her deck, and seen the white houses of Kingston and the mighty ranges of the Blue Mountains rise, as it were, like a scenic picture from the calm sheet of water that lies within the long and sheltering stretch of the Palisades—but yesterday ; and how much had happened since then !

He had loved and lost Virginia ; there had been a revolt, with its attendant atrocities and subsequent punishments ; there had been the marriage of Gertrude Templeton, and the birth of an heir to Viscount Derinzy ; there had been his own most unexpected succession to rank and fortune, that made his recent promotion to a company seem a mere bagatelle ; now all the past seemed a dream, a panorama, that had rolled away, and he was once more going home !

On board the transport were two or three ripe garrison belles—belles that had bloomed fast in the Antilles, gay, pretty, and attractive, with their younger sisters, also going home and in high spirits.

All these were quite ready to console Vere—a handsome young baronet—with whom they had flirted and danced at the governor’s balls, and those at the Admiral’s Pen. But their blandishments were exerted in vain ; for something of the relations between Vere and the heiress of Mango Garden had been whispered abroad, and gave him an interest in

their eyes which, perhaps, he might not have otherwise possessed.

As the transport headed round the coast beyond Morant Point and the Red Cliffs, he saw the inlet of the sea and the fatal precipice that overhung it ; the place where— But he shuddered, turned his eyes away ; and when he looked again the scene of the tragedy was blended with, or lost among, the other features of the coast.

‘Well, Vere,’ said Kyrle Desborough, who had been observing him ; ‘it is a received maxim that everything in this world comes to an end sooner or later. Our sojourn in the Antilles has done so ; and to-morrow we shall hear her majesty’s morning drum beaten on the high road to old England. We have had our last breakfast in Jamaica—breakfast with the butter—ugh !—in a state of liquefaction and thickened with dead flies !’

‘We have fared worse in our time than we have done here in Kingston.’

‘I believe you, my boy. Do you remember that morning in Lucknow, when, among other Indian luxuries, we had a cat curried and served up in rice and green chillies by your rascally kitmutghar ; and the bow-wow pie we shared with old Sir Hope Grant after the capture of Pekin ?’

‘And now we go to Shorncliffe, thank heaven, not Aldershot.’

‘Luckily for us,’ said Finch, joining them ; ‘the new drill in the Long Valley, amid whirlwinds of dust, and over the Fox Hills, would be too much for the brain after the West Indies.’

‘I feel myself getting lazy for that sort of thing now,’ said Desborough ; ‘my mother was a Brady, Toby, and you know what the song says :

“ ‘Oh, I never was fitted for work,
It was never a gift of the Bradys ;
But I’d make a most elegant Turk,
As I’m fond of tobacco and ladies.” ’

‘Or rather, you were fond of them,’ said Toby, feebly

trying to smile, and looking rather pale and uncomfortable, for it was beginning to blow ; there was a heavy sea on, and the time was coming when he and other young subs who, for months past, had been shaving assiduously to have a moustache, forgot all about the performance.

As the transport bore on, Vere's field-glass enabled him to see, diminished to specks in the distance, the giant cabbage-trees that indicated the locality of Mango Garden ; after a time, they seemed to melt away into the general greenery of the Guava Savannah, and with nightfall the ranges of the Blue Mountains were but a fading stripe upon the sea.

Vere sometimes reflected, had the catastrophe—the black and cruel tragedy that shed such a blight upon him—not occurred ; had old Mr. Bellingham bestowed Virginia upon him, and all had been happiness and joy, she would *now* have been going home with him to England, or must he have quitted the service and remained with her in the Antilles ?

Under his new and changed circumstances, with other interests to consider, the latter seemed an improbability ; yet it was in vain that Vere strove *not* to think of what might have been—to reflect and indulge in casuistry whenever he was alone, which in the crowded transport was an event that seldom occurred.

‘ But only think, Vere,’ said his particular chum Desborough, in reply to some such confidence, ‘ only think, old fellow—England, after broiling at Up Park Camp—England, with a baronetcy and twelve thousand pounds per annum in landed property ! By the gods of the Greeks, it is not a bad prospect.’

‘ And she with whom I should have shared it all ?’

‘ She ?’ asked Kyrle, as he took the cigar from his lips and eyed Vere with a comical air of perplexity.

‘ Yes.’

‘ Which ?’

Vere crossed to the other side of the poop angrily, while Desborough laughed a little cynical laugh to himself, and followed him.

‘Don’t be angry with me, Vere,’ said he, laughing again.

‘You laugh, Kyrle,’ said the other; ‘but somehow there are times when, with all your *bouhémie* and general flow of spirits, your laugh is not indicative of happiness.’

‘A laugh is generally supposed to be so.’

‘But with you it seems to indicate some bitter memory.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Kyrle, not in the least annoyed by the tone of retort adopted by his friend.

‘I would give a good round sum to see you thoroughly in love, Kyrle.’

‘Again?’

‘Yes, again if you will.’

‘And you call yourself my *friend*? Well, you would only waste your money; and I hope your friendly desires may never be gratified.’

‘You are an enigma.’

‘What headland is that?’ asked Desborough, to ‘change a subject that always seemed distasteful to him; ‘hand me the binocular—thanks.’

It proved to be the Great Inagua or Heneaga Grande, the largest and most southerly of the Bahama archipelago, that rose like a streak upon the transport’s port-bow—its dangerous coasts surrounded by a perilous wilderness of reefs—a solitary isle, the sole produce of which is salt from a vast pond in its interior.

The cluster named the Caycos were passed next, and as they faded into the evening sea, all in the transport knew that the next land their eyes should see would be Europe; and then all seemed to settle themselves down into their places for the homeward voyage.

In rough weather the watch alone were on deck—the military watch, composed of one third of the troops in their grey greatcoats—or a few of the cabin passengers, who, tired of seclusion in their cabins, ventured upon the poop, or under the shelter of the break thereof, braving the wind and the foam or spooindrift from the waves, and tumbling hither and thither, amid the laughter of the seamen if they failed to

clutch a rope or belaying-pin. In fine weather sometimes the guns would be housed, drawn aside, and a part of the lower deck cleared for a quadrille ; or the band played on the poop when the setting sun was shining on the sea ; and the merry voices of the ladies would be heard as they expressed their astonishment or pleasure, as a drove of shining dolphins went surging past, issuing from the bank of one wave, to plunge headlong into the bank of another ; or it might be a flight of flying fish, perhaps to the number of hundreds, springing from the water, to drop into it again with the sound as of a shower of little stones falling on its surface.

And times there were when, for the amusement of those in the cabin, the boatswain would pipe ‘All hands to skylark,’ and every sailor amused himself for a brief space as he thought best. Then ‘slinging the monkey’ and ‘high kokolorum’ would ensue, with all their rough accompaniment of blows and bruises ; but this, of course, was only in fine weather latitudes, as the great ship steamed steadily onward and homeward, and nightly the constellations of the tropics passed out of sight astern, and others ahead began to be hailed as old and familiar friends.

‘To the girls at home—God bless them !’ said Kyrle Desborough, tossing off his wine, on the first Saturday night, when the toast of ‘Sweethearts and wives’ was drunk in the mess-cabin ; ‘after all I have read of, seen of, heard of, and known of them, there is not a man in the Queen’s service—on earth perhaps—who loves them more than I do !’

‘By Jove, is that Kyrle Desborough or the wine that speaks?’ exclaimed Toby Finch.

‘And I agree with Sterne, “that the man who has not a sort of affection for the whole sex is incapable of loving a single one as he ought to do.”’

‘Bravo, Kyrle !’ said Vere ; ‘we shall begin to have hopes of you after all !’

And after a time, when Desborough saw his friend whirling in a waltz with one of the garrison belles aforesaid, to

the music of one of Strauss's measures, as discoursed by the band on the poop one fine summer evening, he began to think, 'I shall also have hopes of *you* ; a rude shock, if not too violent, is, as some one says, good for the mental and physical system. "It stirs us up, dissipates lethargic tendencies, and sets us thinking in fresh directions, or striking out with renewed energies ;" so certainly the row with the niggers, and its contingent *shock*, have not been without an effect upon Vere of Ours.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CUP-DAY AT GOODWOOD.

It was a day of intense heat, when the stately trees of the spacious park, and the *façade* of the great ducal mansion, with its central mass and wings, seemed to quiver and vibrate in the clear and unclouded sunshine, and when even those who climbed the hill—or the eminence that is called so—found not a breath of air ; when the Norman spire of Chichester Cathedral was barely discernible amid the golden haze, and the usually sparkling waters of the Solent were veiled in mist as they rolled away towards the Isle of Wight.

The Goodwood downs rose softly in sunshine, and rounded in shadow ; but even in the Goodwood grove there was no breeze to temper the summer glare ; and people talked of sun-strokes, pith helmets, and puggarees, and hoisted umbrellas as if they had been on the Maidan of Calcutta.

There was a brilliant and magnificent assemblage ; already the lime-shaded lawn and the balcony of the grand stand were full : the royal standard, floating over Goodwood, seemed to hint that 'the Prince' was expected, especially as Little Drayton station—which is always utilised in connection with the park and the yearly races—was gaily decorated.

In this season more than a hundred and fifty magnificent horses had arrived at Goodwood or in its neighbourhood, and now Cup-day had come, and after the winning and losing of that trophy the glories of the meeting usually wane ; but with

the races our story has less to do than with some of those who came to witness them. All agreed that the assemblage in point of company was a brilliant one. The Hussars from Shorncliffe and elsewhere were there, in irreproachable drags magnificently horsed ; lords and ladies were as thick as buttercups in a meadow ; there were plenty of 'roughs' on the lawn—but well-dressed ones, of course ; and from the intrusion of such, the ducal or house party had to be warded within cords placed along the front of their benches. The loveliest faces that England could produce, and those striking toilettes in which London excels, were seen on every hand, and all was glitter, gaiety, brilliance and excitement long before the first horse had been led round the walk in the grove, ere its shining coat was girt with the tiny pink-lined saddle which your English jockey so affects, and ere the unpacking of hampers and the spreading of snowy table-cloths on the emerald sward beneath the umbrageous beeches suggested iced champagne and appetising pies and nicely-browned chickens, with their drumsticks done up in bows of white ribbon, Watteau feasting combined with Watteau flirtation and groups *al fresco*.

Ere long an outrider might be seen trotting up the roadway ; then the leaders of a plain but royal carriage ; and next the Prince and Princess, receiving the earnest and respectful salutations of the brilliant assemblage ; after which there was not much to be done by the uninterested but to watch the parade of the Cup horses, and look down into the long and beautiful dell, a view of which is commanded from the grand stand.

Widely apart from the beauty and fashion, which were pleasant to observe and look upon, were the prominent greed, selfishness, and cunning in the ring as contrasted with the lawn ; and as soon as the numbers went up came the offers to 'do something' upon such a horse, cries of 'Six to four on the field,' and the mingling voices of backers and book-makers.

On this ever changing and varying but most brilliant

scene—one so different from any they had witnessed for many a day—Herbert Vere and Kyrle Desborough gazed with amusement, surprise, and interest, as they gently moved their horses round outside the lawn, where as many four-in-hands and other carriages as were ever seen at Goodwood were ranged in an orderly manner.

‘So here we are in old England again,’ said Kyrle, laughing, after a pause, during which they had been looking around them in silence ; ‘and the same old game going on the same as ever. The young girls learning how to get husbands, and the old maids, as Salmagundi has it, how to do without them.’

So, after all the wild doings at Morant Bay and Mango Garden, they had been back ere the London season was quite over, back to town in time to ‘do a bit’ of the old life—to dawdle in Pall Mall clubs, to whirl in drawing-rooms, and dally in boudoirs and conservatories ; to doing the Row again, and eating ices at Gunter’s and *saumon à la Trafalgar*; to late hours in the smoking-room ; to air that was no air at all—worse than Jamaica in the wet season ; to too much champagne and too many pick-me-ups of various kinds ; to Prince’s, Lord’s, Hurlingham and Lillie Bridge. But nowhere did they see anything of the Templetons, and Vere, if he thought of it much at all, concluded that they were in the country or elsewhere, owing to the delicate state of health of Lady Derinzy ; and on this day he and Kyrle had come over from Shorncliffe Camp, where their regiment was quartered, to behold the gay doings at ducal Goodwood.

The mounts and general bearing of both men attracted some attention even there. Vere rode a magnificent bright bay, with a star on its forehead, and a quivering skin like satin ; but Desborough’s horse was a handsome thoroughbred, jet black, some fifteen hands high, with a half wild, half frightened air in its restless eyes that told a tale of temper repressed by his rider’s firm hand. Scorched by the fierce glare of the tropical sun, and bronzed by the sea air during the long voyage home, the faces, necks, and ears of the two friends were in hue somewhat like those of Othello ; and

it admirably suited the naturally dark complexion and Spanish-like face of Kyrle Desborough, who really looked dangerously handsome.

'By Jove! how d'ye do?' lisped a passing horseman—Sir Ascot Softeigh, who, with his fair fly-away whiskers, china-blue eyes, and general languid air of insipidity, might have passed for the twin-brother rather than the brother guardsman of his friend Derinzy. 'Vere and Desborough actually doing Goodwood! Home on leave from Jamaica?'

'Leave! not at all, man,' replied Kyrle curtly; 'we are quartered at Shorncliffe. We could scarcely have claimed leave so soon from the West Indies.'

'Thought you might have taken it, like Badminton of the 110th.'

'Taken it! how? The 110th are at Aden.'

'Yet Badminton is here in the ring' ('wing' he pronounced it). 'Good idea, his. He was sent on six months' detachment to the isle of Perim in the Wed Sea, and by filling up all the returns six months in advance, took the P. and O. liner, and chancing it, spends four months of the time in town. Seen the Templetons since your return?'

'No; odd, isn't it?' replied Desborough.

'Not at all; nothing is odd nowadays. But they are here to-day.'

'Here?'

'Saw them quitting their carriage not ten minutes ago; so you may pick them up in the town, with Busby of the Hussars, Lawntennison of ours, and Jocelyn Derinzy of course—the inevitable Derinzy, after all.'

'After *all*?' repeated Vere inquiringly.

'The marriage. What the deuce—don't you know all about it? Yonder is the carriage—pink lining—with the viscountess and the little heir in it. But I forgot; you were busy with that shindy about the black fellows. See you again, ta-ta;' and laughing at some conceit of his own, Sir Ascot ambled away, saying, ere he went, 'The Honourable Maud is still in the market; she is stylish——'

'I hate the word,' said Kyrle.

'So do I; but she has good points about her.'

'Rather too many are visible now; she is becoming *passée* and angular.'

'I do not wish to see these people, Kyrle,' said Vere.

'Which shows that even yet you cannot feign indifference. Now, Vere, your once goddess is on the lawn there amid all that brilliant throng, as large as life and twice as natural. So all you have to do is to get the weather-gauge of mamma, rub up your Byron, and whisper brokenly to Gertrude of cruel Fate, of the unforgotten past, and all that sort of thing, and make your innings and a fool of yourself at the same time.'

'How that cynical tongue of yours runs on!' said Vere angrily; 'do you forget that she is married Kyrle?'

But Kyrle did not reply; and he did not foresee 'the fool he was yet to make of himself.' Being on horseback, and thus conspicuous, it was not long before the speakers caught the eye of one who seemed to see everything and every one, wherever she was—Maud Templeton, who was one of a group seated on rustic chairs languidly and breathlessly under the shadow of a magnificent beech.

'There goes Lady ——,' whispered her mother: 'she is very much in love, they say, and no one is ever ridiculous enough to suppose that a happy frame of mind.'

Ere Maud could reply, if she meant to reply at all, to this sapient remark of Lady Templeton, the frigid air of uninterested languor, which when in public seemed to pervade all her actions, became suddenly dispelled, as our two horsemen, who were intently looking in an opposite direction, caught her eye.

'O mamma, there is *that* Captain Vere whom we met so much a year ago, and with him Captain Desborough!'

Lady Templeton coolly and curiously surveyed them through her glass, as if they had been a couple of Colorado beetles, and shrugged her shoulders.

'You use the pronoun as contemptuously as of old, Maud,' said Gertrude, maintaining an air of perfect equanimity with

an effort ; 'you forget that he has succeeded to one of the oldest baronetcies in England.'

'A baronet ! so he is, true.'

'Sir Herbert Vere of Quincey Hall.'

'How much Jamaica has changed him ! how well and *distingué* he looks !' exclaimed Lady Templeton, with more genuine warmth than was usually infused in her accents, but not her manner, which was as cold and calm as her face, which was smooth and lineless, but handsome as ever.

'He was always a gentleman and soldier in his bearing, mamma,' said Gertrude ; 'the king himself can be no more.'

'Our kings, I hope, are gentlemen, and they were soldiers,' said Lady Templeton.

'That line ended at Agincourt.'

'But you know, Gertrude, it takes three generations to make a gentleman,' said Maud, who could never resist a sneer.

'Perhaps,' interposed Lady Templeton ; 'but one will do for a baronet, as the petty title goes nowadays, the reward of butchers and bakers of civic rank ; and as for knights——'

Lady Templeton paused and fanned herself, as if she was unable to compute their minor value in the scale of society.

Though she had at first remained silent, Gertrude had early detected in the crowd Herbert Vere ; there was no chance of her observation missing or mistaking his perfectly built figure, his piercing dark-grey eyes with their long and sometimes pensive lashes, his well-formed aquiline nose, fine mouth and handsome moustache, his face, like Desborough's, as we have said, all embrowned by the Caribbean sun. She had seen how Vere had been praised in orders, by the governor and captain-general, for his prompt conduct at Morant Bay, and how that high official had expressed his 'admiration for the steadiness and courage with which that officer had acted, the firmness and forbearance he had displayed with other talents, on which his excellency would ever rely.'

She could remember how Maud and her mamma had sneered at all this, all unaware that she was preserving the

newspaper cutting in a secret recess of her desk ; and it was with something of disgust she now heard them talking in most laudatory terms of that very event to Colonel Derinzy, who, on seeing that Kyrle Desborough and Herbert Vere were approaching, made an excuse of going into the ring, and hurriedly withdrew ; for at that moment the friends dismounted, gave their nags to their grooms, and approached the party of Lady Templeton almost involuntarily, under pressure of the crowd.

Kyrle had parted with her and her daughters on the best terms ; and if Vere had not exactly done so, the cause had been explained away by the letter of Toby Finch's sister. Anyway, he felt indifferent on the subject, and resolved to let Gertrude see that he was so. But a kind of blindness seemed to come over her. She heard the voice of Vere—he was speaking to Lady Templeton—but the girl knew not what he said.

CHAPTER XL.

VERE'S MISTAKE.

LADY TEMPLETON spoke to the two officers most suavely, and even was gracious enough to accord her hand.

'Captain Vere, I think. How do *you* do, Captain—I hope it is Colonel—Desborough?' said she.

'I am not so fortunate yet,' replied Kyrle.

'We heard so much about you all, and that terrible affair with the blacks, in Cuba, I think ; or was it San Domingo?'

'Jamaica, mamma,' suggested Gertrude.

'Oh, yes ; what am I thinking of ? Jamaica. And you have recently returned?'

'As you see.'

'And you are quartered at Aldershot?'

'No ; at Shorncliffe.'

'We are so glad to see you again,' said Gertrude. But though this was addressed to Kyrle, her eye fell on Vere, but

fell without effect. He felt himself a mere bowing acquaintance now, and barely made an effort to speak. 'A very different scene this from much you must have looked on lately.'

'Yes,' said Vere; 'and when I see around me the charming English complexions, I cannot but contrast them with the pallid and blanched faces I have left behind me.'

'Ah,' thought Gertude, as she fanned herself, 'he is thinking of his Creole, no doubt.'

'And you have come back,' said Maud, with the old glitter in her eye, 'to take up the threads of your old life, Captain Desborough.'

'Were they golden, Miss Templeton?'

'Silken, I should say.'

'Surely you mean to settle now,' said Lady Templeton to Desborough, but taking in Vere with her glance, as she added, laughing, 'It is time the family jewels were taken out of the strong room at the Bank and being reset, eh?'

'I might have settled in the West Indies, had I chosen,' said Kyrle. 'There was an heiress in the Blue Mountains who was disposed to view me favourably.'

'Indeed! I have heard the belles are very languid there,' replied Maud. 'I suppose she spent her whole time in the carriage.'

'Oh, no; she paddled her own canoe, lived on sangaree and cocoa-nut, and her *modiste's* bills were—well, nothing to speak of.'

'So I can believe. It is a pity you did not bring her to England.'

'She'd have cut a good figure at Goodwood.'

This cool tone of banter did not suit Lady Templeton, who turned a little sharply to a servant, and desired him to bring her a larger fan and her eau-de-cologne out of the carriage-pocket.

Gertrude was all unchanged since Vere had seen her last, and it seemed but as yesterday since he had gazed upon her clearly-cut regular features, her eyes of violet blue, her brilliantly fair complexion, and dark-brown hair with all its

natural ripples. Whatever he thought, or tried to feel, he could not meet her without some emotion ; but he was careful to conceal it, and to harden himself by looking about for the nurse with the baby-heir of the house of Derinzy. He thought he had never seen her looking more beautiful or more exquisitely dressed ; but there was always a perfection in the costume of Gertrude that made her seem to have been—may we say it ?—born in whatever she wore for the time, so carefully were colour and style selected for the carriage, horseback, or otherwise. In her any attempt to excite interest, or hint by a glance, a tone, or a remark to their past secret relations, would have been an indelicacy from which her pride, which was great, naturally recoiled ; and she felt certain that he feared being repelled—so ready is a woman to impute anything but indifference in the man she loves, or who once loved her. But a remarkable *dénouement* was now at hand.

‘I do not see Lady Aldwinkle here,’ said he to Gertrude.

‘Yet she is here.’

‘She is well, I hope ?’

‘Quite well, thanks.’

‘We heard of her marriage when at Up Park Camp ; and—and I believe I have further to offer you my double congratulations, Lady Derinzy.’

Gertrude blushed crimson, and, sooth to say, so did Vere, without knowing why.

‘We saw your presentation at court announced,’ he added, with growing confusion.

‘I beg your pardon, Sir Herbert Vere,’ said Gertrude, growing very pale ; ‘this is some mistake. I am at a loss to understand your meaning.’

Maud lay back in her rustic seat and laughed outright at the discomposure of all parties ; but Lady Templeton said, with some hauteur of manner, ‘You mistake, Captain—I beg pardon, Sir Herbert Vere. The Lady Derinzy who was presented at court is the wife of Colonel Derinzy’s grandfather. The old viscount married, very unexpectedly, a young person whom he met at Homburg.’

'Whew !' thought Kyrle Desborough, and Vere certainly, too.

And this strange explanation of the mistake under which the two friends had been labouring came about thus unexpectedly, yet naturally, amid the blaze and gaiety of Goodwood. For a few seconds a total and awkward silence fell upon all, and for an instant there stole into Vere's eyes an eager, passionate, earnest, and inquiring expression, as they sought those of Gertrude ; but hers were turned away, and luckily, at that crisis, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle came forward, accompanied by Rosamund and followed by a valet with a velvet hassock from the carriage, whereon to repose his gouty feet.

Though startled on finding herself suddenly face to face with Kyrle Desborough, save for the rapidity with which her white bosom rose and fell, no one—not even Maud—could have detected the secret of *her* heart ; and she came most opportunely now, by her gaiety, *espièglerie*, and still almost hoydenish manner (under which she sought to conceal her secret), to relieve the group from the little dilemma into which Vere's 'congratulations' had thrown it. It was evident that Rosamund affected a fastness now that had not been a peculiarity of hers before. She had in her hands a tiny tome, bound in scarlet morocco and richly gilt, and redolent of perfume, which she called her 'betting-book,' and wherein she had dozens of six-and-quarter gloves all duly noted with a jewelled pencil. Her luxuriant golden hair, clustered in a plaited knot, was 'done' to perfection by the skilful hands of Parker, and a bit of bright-blue ribbon, like the old snood of the Scottish maidens, alone peeped forth from its shining masses. Her dress was grey and scarlet, and her little gloves, of pearl-grey, were as perfect as the lovely hands they cased. She soon contrived to draw Kyrle Desborough a little way apart from the group and appropriate him to herself ; they had so much to talk of, she thought.

She looked from time to time furtively, yet tenderly and earnestly, at the all-unconscious or indifferent Kyrle, who

while replying to all her prettily-worded, yet most vague, nothings about the regiment, the West Indies, Shorncliffe, and so forth, was—after having smoothed his thick black moustache, and adjusted his delicate gloves—intent on focussing his binocular, to have a look at the field. He and Rosamund, in the most playful way, made several bets of boxes of gloves, which, of course, he lost in the most pleasant way ; and the bright blue-eyes and the jewelled pencil were busy together. But Herbert Vere approached Gertrude in no such fashion ; and though lingering—he scarcely knew why—beside her, felt that their conversation was frigid and stilted in the extreme.

But she was watching with something of anxiety, as Maud did with much of annoyance, the joyous brightness of Rosamund, who, after one bitter smile, as she thought of the coloured photo which she had kissed and destroyed—the photo found among her repositories by Parker—abandoned herself to all the pleasure of her renewed acquaintance with the original thereof.

She utterly ignored the inquiring glances of Lady Templeton ; and if she thought of Sir Ayling at all, it was certainly in connection with the mysterious ‘ Birdie.’ As a wife she knew that she had now greater liberty than even she possessed as Rosamund Templeton—even as the ‘ Fair Rosamund’ of the Aldershot subs. She knew that she could now invite Desborough to her house, and go or drive where she pleased ; and vague, wild, perilous thoughts were already careering through her brain. Her appropriation of Desborough to a certain extent compelled Vere to linger near Lady Templeton and the two elder sisters ; and the whole situation, as well as its suddenness, perplexed and irritated him.

Derinzy did not come near them. To account for this was not difficult, Vere thought, as he remembered their last interview at Aldershot. But ere the day was over he received from Kyrle Desborough a complete and different explanation of the gallant colonel’s studied absence—that, in short, his presence was not appreciated by Lady Templeton *now*.

Vere had, Gertrude fancied, a wistful and even a sorrowful expression of eye. Was it born, jealousy suggested, of his great grief for the West Indian he had loved?—the girl on whose love she herself had thrust him, and of whose terrible fate she had heard the whole story from Toby Finch's sister, in whose hands, doubtless, it would lose nothing in the narrating.

'It is some time now since—since we last met, and you left—left Aldershot,' said she confusedly, feeling a necessity for saying something, as, sooth to say, he was—perhaps unconsciously—rather taciturn.

'And there have been many changes in that time, Miss Gertrude,' he replied.

'To you, I doubt not—a soldier's life is always a stirring one ; but not to *me*,' was the rather pointed response, of which Vere began to suspect the drift—that she wished to amuse herself with him again ; and he began to school himself to appear what he wished to be—indifferent. Yet when their eyes met, the quick flush or colour, which was one of Gertrude's best attractions, rushed to her cheek, and enhanced her soft yet brilliant beauty. He could not but reflect that it was something to remember how he had covered such a face as hers with kisses on that evening by the stile.

Had he forgotten this? she was asking of herself. Was it all a delusion that he had even asked for her love passionately, and showered caresses on her lips and hair? Was it the dream of a fevered fancy? It almost seemed so, when they, who had been so much to each other for a brief space then, were now conversing on the most common topics, and smiling feebly—well-bred smiles—at each other's remarks, amid the sunshine at glittering Goodwood. On the memory of that meeting by the stile had Gertrude, heartless as he deemed her, lived for more than a year now ; and she would have staked her existence for a mere repetition of it.

He was by her side again—Herbert Vere—after all that had been untoward between them. And this was the time—the meeting so often thought over in fancy, and conned over

—the meeting for which she had been waiting and had watched, as she knew that he was in England—the papers had told her so, that ‘Captain Vere, of the Jamaica insurrection, was at Shorncliffe.’ She had heard of him being here and there; the meeting had seemed to approach and then to recede—to approach once more and to recede again. Now it had taken place, and nothing had come of it but carefully-guarded glances and the commonest platitudes. Surely something more might have been evinced, even in such a place as Goodwood!

Yet such are the idiosyncrasies or contradictions of the human heart, that times there were when Gertrude had hoped she might *never* meet him again in this world, knowing as she did that, whatever he had a right or reason to suspect, her heart had never changed in the interval, whatever his might have done. She was acutely sensible of his presence now; every nerve in her delicate organisation thrilled at the sound of his voice while conversing casually, and to all appearance so calmly, with her mother and Maud or Sir Ayling Aldwinkle.

Poor Gertrude! she is but human, and has loved him dearly all this dreary bitter time. More than once their eyes met with something of doubt and confusion in them, and not as Gertrude wished they should have done. Only once did he make a slight reference to the past, and even then it was done awkwardly.

‘It is strange that we should meet again—here especially.’

‘No, there is nothing strange in it at all,’ said she curtly.

‘To me it seems so.’

‘You forget that the world is but a small place after all, Sir Herbert,’ said she, laughing.

Sir Herbert! How oddly the new name sounded on her sweet lips!

‘Why do you think it strange?’ she asked, after one of those pauses that were perpetually occurring.

‘Life and death are so strangely intermingled.’

(‘Ah, by this sententious remark he must be thinking of the West Indian girl,’ thought Gertrude.)

'Most true,' she said.

'And I have parted with many whom I can meet in this world no more.'

Gertrude was convinced now. This open regret, so she conceived it to be, piqued her pride; she assumed a frigid expression, and then turned with somewhat loquacious gaiety to Sir Ascot Softeigh, who was now leaning over her chair, on which Vere raised his hat and bade them adieu, to look for his groom; but not before he had received pressing invitations from Lady Templeton to Ringwood Hall, and even to Winklestoke, for the shooting-season—invitations to which he accorded a well-bred smile, as he knew they were accorded to the baronet of Quincey Hall rather than to Herbert Vere of the 'Eight or King's.'

Gertrude felt Vere's gloved hand lightly touch hers, and heard his farewell in the usual ordinary commonplace terms; but she never could recall exactly what she said or what *he* said, for a strange giddiness came over her, with a fear lest her eyes or lips might reveal what she felt.

Invited by mamma to Ringwood Hall, and to Winklestoke too: would he come to either? Now she half hoped that he would not. *Now* that she had seen him, and that was all over, if anything ever existed, between him and that Creole girl (which she hoped not), her heart went back with yearning fondness to her former relations with Vere; thus she shivered at the idea of meeting him as a mere ordinary acquaintance in society. Surely that wild and passionate meeting by the stile, after the ball, made some tie between them; at least she loved to think so, and to live on the memory of it.

Did he? Vere, she knew, had been ever a free agent and the master of his own actions; from infancy she had never been for a moment the mistress of hers, but the slave of a system and of society, and she thought of the words of an able writer on this subject as most applicable to herself: 'You are tied down from birth; you never can have your freedom no, not in the most innocent matters, since, when a child,

you rode your pony, you were obliged to follow the formal roads with a guardian behind. They never let you gallop unrestrained over the wild downs, nor linger to muse sweetly alone in the hawthorn lanes. The social corset was laced tighter and tighter about you as you grew up ; your mind was full of many questions, it was not wholly taken up with dress. Thoughts of life and its problems, crude ideas of the wonders of the stars and of the universe, floated dimly through it, and you longed for an explanation and a guide—a guide which instinct told you could only be found among the other sex. But intercourse with them was so restricted, confined entirely to unmeaning nothings—to go further was pronounced unladylike ; and you were taught that your sole object in this life was to obtain a satisfactory marriage settlement.

And under a mother's system, training and guidance, this had been the object inculcated upon her and her sisters, but against which system she and poor Rosamund had as yet striven in vain, and to it the latter had already become a victim.

Vere too had his own strange doubts and speculations. He had made one singular discovery—Gertrude was *not* married to Jocelyn Derinzy ; all that idea had been a gigantic mistake. But then, and then, and then came the conviction that if she were not so, it was because that personage's grandparent had anticipated him in the matrimonial market ; hence how much of Gertrude's freedom was owing to that event, to Lady Templeton, or to herself ?

'Bah !' thought Vere ; 'is it worth considering ? As Kyrle says, they are all alike !'

Yet there had been a soft gentleness in the manner of Gertrude, with an earnest, honest, and inquiring expression in her full fine eyes, that haunted and pleased him.

'So the fair Gertrude is still free ; what a joke it is !' said Kyrle, as he and Vere quitted Goodwood Park and turned their horses' heads towards the nearest station for Shorncliffe. 'But the gallant Colonel Derinzy will never be able to add

her to his stud—to use a pet phrase of his own—if all that Bertie Lawntennison, of the 1st Life, tells me be true.’

‘Indeed ! Why?’

‘It is a case of Sir Ascot Softeigh now, *vice* Jocelyn Derinzy dismissed the service of Mammon.’

‘Because of the old viscount’s marriage and the birth of an heir?’

‘Exactly. He has thirty thousand a year, you only twelve ; she will go to the highest bidder.’

‘Be it so. I don’t mean to enter stakes for the race. Yet I have been invited to Ringwood Hall and to Winklestoke too.’

‘Are you going ? I too have been invited to knock over the birds.’

‘To Winklestoke probably—it is not far from my own place, where the preserves were all destroyed and poached to death in Sir Joseph’s time—but to Ringwood Hall never !’

‘Why?’

‘Because, sooth to say, Kyrle, I fear my own heart,’ replied Vere somewhat vehemently, ‘though I have schooled it to regard her with the indifference her weakness, her fickleness, and her selfish proneness to adopt her mother’s views all deserve. The day will never come again, I hope, when I shall love Gertrude Templeton as I once did, with the wild un-reasoning passion of a Romeo.’

Gertrude was fated to remember long that Cup-day at Goodwood. And so too was Rosamund. She had been listening again to that seductive voice, which was all the more so for being intoned unintentionally, so marvellous in its deep and musical modulation ; the same clear voice that in more than one Indian battle had cried, ‘Come on, men—forward !’ when cannon belched shot and shell, and musketry rattled thick and fast, and which had now been whispering into the little shell-like ear so closely that its owner’s heavy moustache almost touched her, and caused every word to thrill into the girl’s heart, while he was astonished to find the degree of intimacy they had attained before the time for parting came.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE PROGRESS OF EVENTS.

A VAGUE sense of mortification and disappointment, he scarcely knew at what, with some little contempt of himself for permitting Desborough to lure him among the Templetons, either by chance or otherwise, floated through the mind of Vere ; and mentally he hoped again and again that he had not betrayed the least sentiment through the crust of indifference in which he had encased himself. Contrasted with what she had been in the past time, Lady Templeton had been exceedingly gracious.

‘I am not a vain man,’ thought Vere, ‘never was, and I have no pride either in my new-fangled title or money ; but, any way, I am not disposed to act the part of *pis aller* to Colonel Derinzy or to Sir Ascot either, if such is the little game of Gertrude and her mother.’

‘You stuck like a burr to the skirts of the Fair Rosamund to-day,’ said he.

‘You are wrong there, my boy,’ replied Kyrle ; ‘the Fair Rosamund stuck to me.’

‘How ungallant of you to say so !’

‘Not at all ; she is only a spoiled child, poor thing, to be humoured and petted to any amount. Besides, even with all her surroundings, her life must be a dull—at least, not a happy one. Until I saw that old man hobbling about her, I never was so impressed with that idea before.’

And Vere remarked that from that day Desborough’s generally caustic remarks upon Lady Aldwinkle and her marriage were uttered no more, save once. Since that epoch it was evident that she had not subsided into the pleasant, or at all events comfortable, obscurity enjoyed by the mass of the married, after the bride ceases to be an object of interest as a wedded wife ; for her own great beauty and extreme youth, as contrasted with the age and appearance of her husband, caused her still to be the source of much

speculation that, despite the girl's purity and goodness of heart, was not always friendly ; but such is the way of the world.

'Rosamund is still charming as ever,' observed Vere.

'Yes,' said Kyrle Desborough, 'but no doubt as selfish and as worldly as all her set, and heaven only gave her that innocence of manner, that happy *abandon*—what you will—like her soft blue eyes, by some strange mistake.'

'Mistake ! Not at all, Kyrle.'

'Then why did she marry that horrid old fellow ?' he asked, with sudden emphasis.

'Kyrle, surely you know as well as I do the awful power of studied and deliberate domestic nagging, pressure, and annoyance, as exemplified by Lady Templeton.'

'Poor girl, poor girl !' responded the other, and he seemed to become more thoughtful than Vere had ever seen him be ore. 'Lady Templeton, in a rallying tone—a tone that suits her ill—gave me some pointed hints about "settling," as she called it ; but I could see that her eye wandered to *you*, Vere ; and, in truth, matrimony is only suited for such fellows as Aldwinkle and you.'

'Why us in particular ? I don't thank you much for the conjunction of names.'

'Well, the requirements of the dear creatures are so astounding now, they can't exist without a carriage, a pair of matched lazy brutes called footmen, with cauliflower heads, canes and calves ; one lady's maid at least, a bull-pup, or a mastiff like a Shetland pony, with a spike collar ; and of course a stately mansion in Tyburnia. An ordinary fellow's whole income won't find them pin-money ; and in sooth, a swell girl of the period is a perilous party to face, with her chatelaine and all its gimcrackery rattling by her side, a dog-whistle, mirror and comb, purse, corkscrew, and button-hook, tiny binocular, scent-bottle, and tablets. No woman shall ever add *me* to her many appendages.'

'So all the time we were abroad we have been labouring under a mistake concerning who was Lady Derinzy.'

Desborough coughed dubiously.

'Don't misunderstand me,' said Vere, with a shade of annoyance ; ' could I obtain Gertrude to-morrow, by simply raising this little finger——'

' Handsome diamond that is you have upon it.'

' Hang the diamond, Kyrle !'

' Well ?'

' I would not do it——'

' While there remained a possibility of her now preferring Sir Ascot, you would say. Quite right ; it is only a matter of money. They are all alike. Lady Templeton's ambition aims at coronets, but she would trample on strawberry-leaves, if it suited her game to do so.'

Next morning two formal invitations to Winklestoke for the 1st of September, St. Partridge's day, reached the friends at Shorncliffe camp, both pleasantly couched, but in the shaky and uncertain caligraphy of the old baronet, who informed Desborough that Lady Templeton was unable to come, but Lady Aldwinkle would be sole matron and hostess, in the duties of which she was endeavouring to prevail on Gertrude to assist her. Sir Ascot and some others were coming ; the party would be small, but very jolly.

The invitation Desborough hastened to accept, and Vere, after some hesitation, felt it might be churlish to decline. He had no desire to watch the operations of Sir Ascot ; but he would endeavour to show Gertrude that he was now heart-whole ; so acceptances were at once despatched.

' The preserves at Winklestoke are famed all over the country, and the birds are in excellent order, I hear ; but,' said Vere hesitatingly, ' if this invitation prove a trap——'

' Baited by the fair Rosamund, with so tempting a bird as Gertrude ?'

' Bah ! you shall see,' replied Vere, who, as little as his bantering friend, foresaw the traps and pitfalls that lay before the latter.

In spite of himself and his assertions of indifference, Herbert Vere had secretly to admit to his own heart that he

was far from quite feeling so, and that since he had seen and conversed with Gertrude again, something of the old time was stealing over him, and the idea of Sir Ascot Softeigh inspired undoubted disgust and annoyance. This might be weakness; 'but weakness when a woman is concerned,' says the novelist, 'is pardonable in the man who loves (or has loved) her; and firmness too often prognosticates an absence of affection.'

So after all that had passed—anger and mortification, sorrow and jealousy; the brief passion for Virginia, and that terrible episode at Mango Garden—could it be that he was about to venture as a mere acquaintance, a mere member of society, into that charmed circle again? Vere pondered over this, with knitted brows, and questioned himself, as he sought the solitude of a battery overlooking the sea, and cast his eyes dreamily to where, in the short distance, only about two miles off, lay Folkestone in a hollow between two precipitous cliffs that are washed by the encroaching waves—waves that in the process of time have already swept away four of its churches and a convent. The pleasant watering-place, with its piers and all its gliding steamers, lay steeped in summer haze; and it seemed as but last week that he had been looking on Kingston Harbour, and the long stretch of the Palisades that guard it from the Caribbean Sea.

When we can do so, it is always wisest, perhaps, to forget—to put away the past altogether; but many portions of the past would come to memory again and again; for, like all men of lively imagination, he was somewhat of a day-dreamer.

'Enough of this,' thought he, turning away, and then quoted Sidney Dobell:

' " I have lingered by the past,
As by a deathbed, with unwonted love,
And such forgiveness as we bring to those
Who can offend no more. " '

Pleased to see that the hitherto listless Rosamund was so full of life and so joyous, and interested in the intended shooting-party for the 1st of September, Sir Ayling had with-

out delay dashed off the invitations to Vere, Desborough, and others, and all looked forward to a pleasant meeting on St. Partridge's day ; but Gertrude and Rosamund with anticipations that were somewhat dubious, and the half confidences of these two were strange.

So Rosamund had seen Kyrle Desborough at last ; yet the cravings of her heart were not yet over. The man so uselessly loved, and apparently so utterly lost to her—he whom she had dreamt of more by day than in her sleep—had been with her again, and was to be so once more, breathing the same air, moving in the same circle, as if he had never gone away, and was soon—in a few days now—to be actually under her own roof—a perilous situation.

It has been said that ' there are corners in the nature of the simplest peasant girl to which the cleverest man alive could never find a key ;' and certainly there was a corner in the heart of Gertrude Templeton of which Vere, with all his real and fancied past knowledge of her, had not the least idea, though it contained a welling fount of love for himself. Nor could he have suspected it by the cold, quiet, subdued, and indifferent manner in which she received him and conversed with him on the merest commonplaces—studiously never being alone with him for a moment, even had he wished it—and gave more of her time, her attention, and with more animation, to tall Sir Ascot, the vapid Lawntennison, and others, when on the last evening of August he and Kyrle Desborough found themselves at the sumptuous dinner-table of Winklestoke, whither a four-wheeled dogcart had brought them, their baggage, and guncases, from the nearest railway station.

The circumstance that Vere was now the possessor of a baronetcy and a fortune, with the memory of her mother's excessive suavity to him at Goodwood, had alarmed the innate pride of Gertrude ; but when Rosamund said to him, with a peculiar smile, ' I have had some trouble in prevailing upon Gertrude to join us,' and Maud added, in a *sotto voce*, ' Even when Sir Ascot was to be one of the party,' Gertrude was secretly provoked and troubled lest the remark should

reach the ear for which it was malevolently intended, for in some things the high-bon Maud could be as churlish and pettish as a barmaid.

The memory of their past relations, the events that had intervened since that unforgotten time, and the peculiarity of the whole situation, made Gertrude adopt a bearing or act a part she was far from feeling ; and certainly her *rôle* was not calculated to make Vere—all doubtful as he was how Sir Ascot stood with her, and studiously indifferent as he strove to be—come forward in the character of a lover again.

Thus, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and music was resorted to, when Gertrude played or sang, she studiously avoided her old songs or airs, though she knew well those which were, or were wont to be his favourites. Not so Rosamund. To draw Kyrle to her side she quite as studiously recurred to her old *répertoire*, and pressed him to say if he remembered this, that, or the other song ; while Sophy Finch, with annoying pertinacity—annoying at least to Gertrude—asked Vere questions in quick succession about the West Indies, the alleged grace of the Creole ladies, if they were adepts at flirtation, and so forth.

Would Vere ever be more to her than a friend or acquaintance again ? if not, would he come to her with only the ghost of a dead love ? It did not seem probable, for he, inspired by his own secret thoughts, affected a gay *insouciance* of manner rather calculated to pique a girl so proud as Gertrude. Even when she was thus questioning herself his eye would wander almost wonderingly towards her. She was before him again—the Gertrude he had loved so well : the Gertrude of the ball at Ringwood Hall ; of the meeting by the stile, when he had rained kisses on her face and hair till she bade him leave her for ever ; the Gertrude of countless day-dreams, hopes, and wishes, and of that stony stare which, on that eventful morning, made his heart stand still. Well, well, that was all past and over now. Rosamund clung much to Vere, as a pleasant feature in her past life, as the friend of Kyrle Desborough, and as the once lover of her sister ; she clung

to him as a friend, with whom she might converse, laugh and be free ; for the love, which she believed he still bore Gertrude, made her deem their intercourse safe from any suspicion of there being flirtation in it.

The few day's shooting over, Vere intended to return to Shorncliffe ; but this was by no means to be permitted, as Rosamund had prearranged a programme including a score of rides, drives, picnics, and garden-parties ; and, more than all, she had contrived to include therein a visit to Quincey Hall, which was only some twelve miles distant, over the borders of the adjacent county.

It was pretty evident to any close observer—and Herbert Vere was one—that her mind was ill at ease. When silent, and her bright soft face was in repose, dejection was its chief expression. If noticed, she would start and plunge into conversation rapidly, spasmodically, almost vehemently, and with a gaiety that was too apparently all acting. The time that had passed, short though it was, had alike altered and improved the figure of Rosamund. The latter had gained in roundness of outline, and her eyes had a depth—often a sad depth—of expression—a yearning look which they did not possess before ; and now, when at times they met those of Kyrle Desborough, she was foolishly, dangerously tempted to lay bare to him the secrets of her girlish heart.

CHAPTER XLII.

ST. PARTRIDGE'S DAY.

THE dawn of the first shooting-day came brightly and pleasantly in, over all the shire around baronial Winklestoke, and some things but remotely connected with the sport, though 'trifles light as air,' which occurred ere that day was over gave Vere some food for reflection, surprise, and mistrust. All unaware of the breech-loaders that were coming into action against them, the coveys of little brown birds were nestling quietly among the yellow stubble, the rich clover, the man-golds and turnips, which recent rains had refreshed and bene-

fited. As yet the new-fangled idea of driving the birds with 'the kite' had been unthought of; and Sir Ayling and his brother sportsmen intended to shoot, as usual, behind pointers and setters, or to beat a line without them.

To hold St. Partridge's day, the male guests at Winklestoke assembled betimes to a hasty breakfast in the grand old dining-hall, from the walls of which the Aldwinkles of past times, in quaint costumes, stared stonily or haughtily down from their oak frames, and from the mullioned windows of which could be seen the far extent of level English landscape, fragrant bean-fields, stubble, and still standing corn, interspersed with patches of heather and fern, where the red-legged birds were lurking.

Sir Ayling was the last to appear at table, where his guests did not wait his appearance to attack what the butler had provided. But, a beau always—an old one latterly, of course, with all his years—having a young wife, he found it more than ever necessary to sacrifice sundry half-hours daily to the personal graces; and now he appeared, like lisping Lawntennison and the youngest present, in an orthodox knickerbocker suit and gaiters, the former being of what is amusingly called in England a *plaid* suit—a plaid being a garment, and not a material. Similarly attired for the sport were the two comrades of the Eighth, tall fair-haired Sir Ascot Softeigh, little Lawntennison of the Household troops, and a few others—all hardy and healthy young fellows, in high spirits, with keen anticipations of the day, the hopes of which were discussed, together with the merits of certain dogs, double-barrels, game-bags, ammunition-pouches, silver flasks, and sandwich-cases.

Sir Ayling prated much of sport in the days when Murcott's 'hammerless,' Greener's breech, and chilled-shot cartridges were unknown; yet he was never wont to indulge in remote reminiscences when Lady Aldwinkle was present. But while assisting Kyrle Desborough to demolish the contents of a grouse-pie, with brandy and soda 'to steady his hand,' little Lawntennison whispered his intention of giving the

baronet a pretty wide berth, as, though a good shooter, he was 'a deuced bad hitter, don't you know,' and apt to pot some luckless beater or too confiding guest.

On the terrace without were the keepers and beaters, with Sancho, Ponto, Don, and Co. ; and at the gate stood a dog-cart, with fresh ammunition for the breech-loaders.

Lady Aldwinkle, with some of the ladies, was to join the sportsmen at the moat, a relic of antiquity on the estate, where a formidable luncheon would be provided under superintendence of the butler ; and, anticipating the pleasures of this veritable picnic as one of the chief events of the day, the gentlemen shouldered their guns and set forth over the swelling uplands, where the soft breeze was sweeping, and the September morning was so charming, as Vere thought, after the West Indies. The sunlight seemed so yellow on the crisping foliage, as it exhaled the silver mist from the grassy hollows, while the chirp of familiar birds came from hedgerows and copsewood. The beaters and dogs went forward ; a line of fire was adopted, and the banging of the breech-loaders began on every hand. Vere was a magnificent shot ; so was Desborough. The worst present was undoubtedly their host, of whom the beaters had a nervous dread ; and the veteran game-keeper—who knew well his place, did his duty to his master, and never looked for 'tips,' from his guests—did his best to cloak the mistakes of Sir Ayling, who was always firing too soon or too late, knocking over another man's birds, and often vainly attempting to keep up with the younger sportsmen—an impossibility at his years ; and, after expending a vast amount of ammunition uselessly on the atmosphere, he ceased firing, alleging that the wind had become strong—the birds had been blown out of range. He promised to turn up at the moat betimes ; so the younger men went forward without him, making excellent sport ; for thick and fast the brown coveys came whirring up from between the rows of beans and yellowing turnips, the greater globes of the mangold, the purple heather, and the whortle-berries ; and the game-bags became filled to overflowing as hour followed hour in the

pleasant and breezy sunshine. Seeing that Vere was a good shot, who fired deliberately and never missed, the old game-keeper kept chiefly by his side till they drew near the moat, when the last shots were fired.

'There's a brace of black game, Sir Herbert,' he exclaimed. 'Cluck-cluck they go—you take the outer bird, sir.'

Desborough covered the other : bang went their barrels, and the birds came fluttering down.

'They *are* a-growing wildish,' said the keeper, 'and chances musn't be throwed away. Watch, gentlemen—old Don is a standing like a statty—creep up, Sir Ascot ; there goes the bird—you've hit at an uncommon range. And now, gentlemen, by your leave we'll lay aside the guns ; for this is the moat, and I see my lady cooming down the hill with the loonch.'

On a slight knoll, in the centre of a rich clover-field, rose the moat, a relic of the Saxon times. It was simply a circular earthen bank, some fifty yards in diameter, and marked the site of some ancient wooded dwelling. Without it, a circular ring of darker grasses, where rushes grew in wet seasons, showed where the veritable wet moat had been ; within it, the turf was soft, close, and green as any within a fairy ring. And here Sir Ayling, who had long since preceded the party, awaited them ; and as no ladies were present as yet, he candidly admitted that the damp morning air had given him some warning twitches of rheumatism.

The bags were emptied, the partridges, grouse, hares enumerated, and, exclusive of the latter, averaged some eighty brace to each gun, which Sir Ayling, though he had 'knocked over' but few, averred to be a poor half-day's sport, as he could remember that forty years before it was only deemed good average shooting for a sportsman with one muzzle-loader, which after every shot he recharged with his ramrod, to bag his fifty brace of birds between breakfast and dinner.

'And twenty years before that, I have heard it said,' he continued, but suddenly arrested his reminiscence, and started up with his little skipping step, as Lady Aldwinkle (preceding

an open chariot, in which were her sisters and two other ladies), seated in a vehicle that was something between a phaeton and a dog-cart, came through the clover-field, tooling her pretty ponies to the place appointed, a little tiger seated behind, the reins grasped in her tiny gloved hands, as she flicked the glossy animals with her silver-handled whip, and looked so radiant in face and spirit, so full of animation and the glow of youth.

Coquettishly-dressed, coquettish-looking and beautiful, with a brightness over all her face, she certainly formed an object of interest to the circle who gathered about her quite as much as the luncheon, brought by butler and servants to assuage the wants of the sportsmen, who announced themselves savagely hungry and fearfully thirsty as they espied the metallad necks of the champagne flasks in the ice-pails.

As a servant threw down the step of the chariot Vere passively permitted Sir Ascot to assist Gertrude to alight, and gave his hand to Sophy Finch, who was the last to leave her seat; yet Gertrude was radiant in beauty that morning, and it was her face still on which he had once gazed with voiceless yearning. Would he ever do so again? To Gertrude it did not seem so, though a woman never can realise the conviction that she has quite lost all interest in the heart of a man who has once loved her.

Somehow now Rosamund became—from her position doubtless and the general ‘breeze’ she seemed to carry with her—the central feature of the party; and Maud, so generally cold, calm, and unimpressionable, gave place to her as completely as did the gentler and more loving Gertrude. Now, as we have shown, Rosamund was mistress of that stately mansion, the great *façade* of which could be seen in the distance; of another in Portland Place; of lands and demesnes, of men-servants and maid-servants; and yet, in a hoydendish way, instead of sending the luncheon to the moat, she preferred joining the sportsmen with it, and sharing in the jollity of a repast *al fresco*. But, save herself, none knew what a spur her life had received since that Cup-day

at Goodwood. More carefully than ever were the always faultless toilettes made ; more trouble than ever had Parker now with the golden hair of her mistress ; frequent indeed were the consultations with the oval mirror framed in lace and pink ribbons, and the tall pier-glasses in the dressing-closet ; and Parker, who remembered the photo of the dark and handsome officer she discoursed once upon, but never saw again, began to have some views of her own in the matter.

And so the gaiety of Rosamund's manner delighted Sir Ayling, who had never seen her thus since their marriage. She had a pretty little sentence, view of, or word on most social subjects, and could talk in the most attractive way in the world, giving petty topics an air of importance they failed to possess on the lips of another. Her charm of manner won and fascinated the people about Winklestoke ; the more so that she was good, generous, and hospitable to all, and won golden opinions from them. Yet it was apparent to them that her face, her figure, and her deportment were all too girlish for her position as the wife of a man who looked almost old enough to be her grandfather. Thus, with her own pretty hands, she presented a foaming beaker of champagne to the old keeper ; while cold chicken, ham, tongue, and grouse-pie, *pâtés*, and other dainties, were undergoing a rapid process of change, all laid on a snowy cloth, spread over the turf in the centre of the moat ; and much light small talk became the order of the hour—small talk in which Gertrude strove wearily to join.

No true man ever forgets a woman he has once loved. It was impossible for Herbert Vere to regard Gertrude—the planet into whose orbit he had been lured again—without a tender interest ; yet, deceived by her decided manner, he, acting under impulses that were perfectly natural, gave place to Sir Ascot on every occasion, and spoke but little with Gertrude. He had a general feeling of annoyance that he had come to Winklestoke at all ; and she, with that pride or perversity which is—some allege, *we* do not—natural to woman, replied to him all the more coldly when he *did*

address her. Both were already playing a part, and feared to show the other their hands. Vere's careless cordiality stung her; yet he must have been blind if he did not perceive that, though her voice and manner betokened indifference, her calm and beautiful eyes always lit up when he turned towards her, or addressed her.

Gertrude Templeton was not yet two-and-twenty; but at times she seemed to have left behind her every wish and hope of youth, as if she had been as old and heartless as her mother, and, little as *he* knew it all, for the love of Herbert Vere, whose changed prospects—rank and fortune—seemed to her pride a barrier as fatal as his past had been, when judged of by the standard requisite at Ringwood Hall. Nor were the cold strange glances, the sneering and worldly remarks or maxims of Maud, without effect in keeping open this breach quite as much as the sometimes half-quizzical, half-commiserating tone assumed by Miss Sophy Finch, when talking to Vere—on her brother Toby's authority—of his varied experiences in the West Indies.

CHAPTER XLIII.

'UNSTABLE AS WATER.'

'AND this is what I have vaguely looked to so long—this meeting,' thought Gertrude many times; 'but to have it thus at Winklestoke, was beyond my wildest aspirations. In my heart I always said he would return; he has returned, and we are all but side by side just now. He cared for me once, and did all that man could do to make me sure of it, till I thrust his heart from me, poor fellow! And now he is changed to me—so changed—and he can go on as he is doing with that Finch girl!'

She strove to thrust her thoughts aside, as she had once done Vere's heart, and turned to reply to the platitudes of Sir Ascot, but heard also the silly things with which Sophy Finch thought to attract Vere.

'Then you do believe in the truth of the axiom?' said

Sophy, whose beauty, though bright, was tender and soft, and the sunlight seemed to play among the amber glory of her hair, as she toyed coquettishly with a tiny bunch of grapes near her pretty pouting lips, and a smile in her half-closed eyes.

'What axiom?' asked Vere, as he knelt on the grass by her side, his handsome figure and limbs set off to perfection in his smart shooting-costume, of very light grey, which contrasted well with his sun-browned complexion.

'That absence makes the heart grow fonder.'

'Not always, Miss Finch.'

'You soldiers must test the truth of it at times.'

'Perhaps, but it all depends upon circumstances.'

'And the strength of a man's love.'

'Unless it be a hopeless one.'

'In which case, Sir Herbert?'

'It soon dies, probably, especially amid new surroundings and change of scene.'

'Change of love and love of change,' continued Sophy, with one of her many unmeaning laughs, which now grated on the ear of Gertrude, who fanned herself, and drew aside a little way, lest she might hear more of this sort of thing; for Sophy Finch had talked so much to Vere about the Eighth, the West Indies, and her brother Toby's appreciation of the Creole girls, and the sleepy, dreamy, graceful Octoroons, that she had quite appropriated him, and had, so Gertrude thought, a provoking air of subdued triumph in having, as she conceived, captivated the handsome baronet, dear Toby's brother-officer; and the cold, watchful, and glittering eyes of Maud seemed to catch the same idea.

'You have made excellent sport, I see, Sir Herbert,' said Lady Aldwinkle, as her eyes ran over the birds arranged by braces on the sward close by, and addressing Vere, to mar if possible, Miss Finch's game.

'Very fair indeed,' replied he; 'but I have been out of practice for some time past.'

'Surely,' said Miss Finch, 'you had some shooting in the West Indies.'

‘Well, not at game precisely,’ replied Vere, laughing.

‘Oh yes, horrid ; at that place, Mango Island, was it not ?’ blundered Sophy, and Gertrude saw a shadow pass over Vere’s face.

‘These black game were the last birds killed,’ said Kyrle Desborough, to change the subject, and leading Rosamund to where they lay.

‘I have half a mind not to listen to you,’ Vere heard her reply.

‘In what have I offended ?’ asked Kyrle, in a low tone of affected entreaty.

‘Cutting me this morning.’

‘This morning—you, Lady Aldwinkle ?’

‘When you all left the Hall I was at my window, and waved my handkerchief. You alone were looking back, and should have seen me, if you did not.’

And as Kyrle made the requisite apologies and protestations, they moved to the other side of the moat, and Miss Finch renewed her conversation with Vere. When the latter turned towards their hostess again, she was teaching a frolicsome Maltese spaniel—a present brought her by Desborough in payment of some bet made at Goodwood—to beg for almond biscuits ; and in this pleasant task Vere was rather amused to see his tall brother-officer both earnest and attentive. Rosamund next plucked a wild rose, and dropped it with a little childish cry of pain, which made Sir Ayling lift his eyes from a grouse pie that he was carving. A thorn had pierced her finger, and to have the point thereof extracted she held forth her pretty hand to Kyrle Desborough ; and to the eyes of Herbert Vere this operation seemed to be quite as needlessly prolonged as the subsequent buttoning of a tight kid glove upon the same tiny member. But, indeed, a time came when the cavalier attentions of Kyrle, in the matters of glove buttoning, bracelet-clasping, shawling, or assisting Rosamund to her saddle, seemed to be processes that were alike difficult and protracted ; and from all of which Vere began to see that the renewed intimacy was making rapid progress. Was Kyrle

Desborough—Kyrle, the handsome cynic, whose story no man knew—the supposed misogynist or woman-hater, succumbing at last and to a married lady, or was it merely his vanity? But Kyrle was not a vain man, that was flattered by the regard—‘fuss’ he would have called it—that he had created in the mind of a pretty girl, without knowing how or when to value it. Vere was perplexed by the turn matters seemed to be taking, and was not sorry when the luncheon was over, the ladies had departed, and the gentlemen once more betook them to their guns, to make a little *détour* among the fields and shoot their way back to Winklestoke.

The protracted dinner there over, there ensued in the drawing-room the same playing of parts or display of false colours, the same little game of fencing and cross-purposes, on the part of some of our *dramatis personæ*, and Vere was pleased to find an infusion of a few strangers, including the Rev. Deogratias Guffin (and his four daughters), the portly vicar of the parish, ‘a priest,’ as he called himself, having intensely ritualistic tendencies, and certes, with his narrow Roman collar and long-tailed surtout he rather looked it, save for his rubicund visage and somewhat rollicking expression of eye.

To escape Miss Finch, lest he should play the part of indifference to rudeness, Vere took refuge with the daughters of the divine, while Maud and the former young lady idled together over the piano, and most of the sportsmen were clustered about the chair of Gertrude. Rosamund, seated on an ottoman in the recess of a window where none could get behind her, contrived to keep Desborough pretty closely on duty near herself, if duty he considered it; and, sooth to say, no fairer girl ever dazzled a man’s sight than the lady of Winklestoke, as she sat there so full of *verve* and *esprit*, with the light of the gaselier shedding its flood upon her golden hair, her snowy skin and delicately-lidded eyes, that alternately sparkled or drooped as Kyrle conversed with her in that perilous way which no man knew better when and how to adopt than he. Rosamund’s heart was weak though passionate. ‘Lead me not into temptation,’ she prayed fervently,

but sought it herself and deluded herself. She felt faithful but faint, and while protesting to herself that she only meant to kill time pleasantly, was perhaps letting her hopes and imagination stray towards a love that terrified her. Thus, amid the baronial and storied splendour of the great drawing-room that night, Herbert Vere saw some things and painfully suspected more, which old Sir Ayling, 'drowsily digestive' in his luxurious easy-chair, winking and blinking and half asleep after the unwonted labours of the past day, neither saw nor suspected.

That night in the smoking-room the lines or ground of the next day's sport and that of the following day were laid out, and the events of the morning—the hits, misses, and braces bagged—were all gone over with some zest, as if it had been a day's hunting. Vere fully intended on the third day to take his departure, and Kyrle Desborough willingly enough consented to accompany him; but London was empty, so were the covers and preserves at Quincey Hall, which had been poached and destroyed in Sir Joseph's time, and to return to Shorncliffe before their leave expired would look eccentric. Moreover, Rosamund had plans of her own, as we have already said—entertainments and visits of many kinds, including those to a cathedral and a rambling old ruined castle; hence to leave Winklestoke as yet seemed ungracious and impossible; so Vere remained, and Kyrle Desborough of course stayed also.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DRIFTING.

SEVERAL of the affairs projected by the now busy mind of Rosamund came off successfully and brilliantly in rapid succession; and poor Sir Ayling found himself suddenly involved in a whirlpool of more gaiety than he cared for at his years or quite expected to see again, especially in the country at Winklestoke.

Without reflecting that two 'real live baronets,' Vere and

Sir Ascot, who formed a part of their circle, were quite ignored, Kyrle Desborough went in with the girl's humour in making him rather too apparently the lion of her entertainments. Who would not have done so? Married now, she was beyond his reach for ever, and, save as a laughing little partner at balls and croquet parties, he had never, as Rosamund knew, thought of her in the past times. He had no idea of wronging her before the world, in thought or deed; yet if *he* was not drifting, she was doing so rapidly and swiftly; and with all the old wild thoughts she had in her saddened heart, and which we have described already, what else could be expected of poor Rosamund *now*? The secret confidences of a pretty girl are, as a general rule, rather pleasant burdens to hear; still more pleasant to some perhaps, if more perilous, are those of a young married woman, who should have no confidant save her husband: but Vere was rather surprised to hear Kyrle say laughingly, in a low tone, when replying to some remark of Rosamund's, 'Oh yes, Lady Aldwinkle, it is true that people may love and love again, and yet find they are mistaken, for the true passion may be yet to come.'

'It is but too true.'

'You so young, and yet think so?'

'Alas, yes!' said the girl, looking down.

'How sang old Bishop Atterbury of this idea?'

'I know not.'

Then, bending over her so near that his dark moustache almost touched her shining tresses, Kyrle Desborough, with unusual *empressment*, repeated the bishop's well-known verse,

"Fair Sylvia, cease to blame my youth
For having loved before;
For men, till they have learned the truth,
Strange deities adore."

And it is only when people learn the truth, as I trust Lady Aldwinkle has done, that they are happy.'

This sounded much more like mockery than love-making,

under all the circumstances ; but, raising her soft and now tearful eyes to Kyrle's handsome face, the girl, while her colour came and went, said almost reproachfully, in a whisper, 'Happy ! Do you, Captain Desborough, think that *I* am happy ?'

'With all your brilliant surroundings, why should you not be so ?'

'Ah, but is any one ever quite happy ?'

'I should hope so ; surely many are.'

'Perhaps so,' answered the girl drearily, wearily, and half absently toying with her beautiful bouquet, as memory flashed back to that night at Ringwood when he kissed her in the conservatory, and took away her glove.

'Wealth, rank, and position surely must afford a certain degree of happiness,' said Kyrle, almost in her ear.

'To some—yes.'

'To you ?'

Rosamund shrugged her shoulders, and said, 'Let us not talk of *that*, Captain Desborough.'

'Why, Lady Aldwinkle ?'

'I can scarcely conceive any position in life free from some care, some canker, some worm in the bud, some secret misery or skeleton in the closet.'

He regarded her with deepening interest for a few seconds, and then said, 'In one so—so—one such as you, these ideas are surely peculiar. What am I to think of you, Lady Aldwinkle ?'

'What you please !' was the strangely pettish reponse of Rosamund, as she rose and joined Gertrude.

Vere began to ponder. Was Kyrle Desborough beginning to make light of *his* secret, of having loved before ?

Passages such as this, odd words overheard, glances seen, or speeches and glances checked at his approach, began to rouse in Herbert Vere those suspicions which, once roused, are difficult to lull, and made him feel strangely uncomfortable, both for Lady Aldwinkle and his friend ; and yet he strove to pooh-pooh the growing situation, and hope there

might be 'nothing in it,' after all, but a mere affair *pour passer le temps*.

Poor Rosamund had fondly and confidently believed that now she was wedded—most hopelessly so—she would be safe from any fancy, passing or otherwise ; and that if thought became a sin, as the gentle wife of Robin Gray deemed it, like her she could stamp it out altogether ; but she felt this resolution sorely shaken now, tottering, and fading out under the perilous influence of Kyrle Desborough's society ; and the same lack of strength which made her the passive tool of her mother now rendered her incapable of resisting in this instance.

Though Kyrle had 'a front like Jove's, to threaten and command,' he had dark and winning Irish eyes that could melt in expression and tenderness when we do not believe the rogue actually felt it, or did so from mere force of habit. In conversation he rarely or never failed, and it often seemed as if those unthought-of and unheeded trifles that come so glibly from an Irishman's tongue, and in the *abandon* of petty small talk, had most weight with his listeners—too generally fair ones ; and so it was that while Rosamund listened and contrasted the lithe and manly figure of Kyrle with that of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, and his handsome face, bronzed and darkly moustached, with the withered mask of her lord and master, which was undeniably aristocratic in contour (and aristocratic in imbecility), she felt herself, we fear, drifting.

'What is the magic in this man that attracts me to him?' the girl would at times ask of herself, while, interlacing her fairy fingers, she would fix her eyes upon vacancy ; 'I might have been happy in a quiet stupid way if I had never met him, and might be if I could forget him ; and yet—yet there are some things one would be unwilling to forget completely. He has come again to give me a new interest in life—but an interest most dangerous. It is fatality !'

If pleasant, it was also torture to be so near him, and yet so far from him—he so much to her, she so little to him ; she,

who loved him so in the past time, and did so still, all the more that her unsought wedded life was but a garish and perpetual funeral—yea, a living death. A dangerous propinquity is always given by a residence in a country house, though Winklestoke was as big as a barrack, and their intimacy was fast becoming too playful, too confidential, too—it was difficult to define precisely what.

‘Can Kyrle be losing his head?’ thought Vere, ‘or his heart?’ suggested suspicion ; and he longed to have him back at Shorncliffe, especially after he overheard Lawntennison of the Blues and another visitor jesting on the subject.

‘I say, Lawn, old fellow,’ asked the latter, ‘who the dickens is he?’

‘Oh, one of the Eighth or King’s.’

‘He and she seem on doocid good terms, don’t you know ; he must be a cousin, a relation—a very old friend, at all events, to go the pace thus ; wish it was my luck. Perhaps she means no mischief ; but it looks doocid like it.’

Remarks such as these were as gall and wormwood to a man of Herbert Vere’s disposition, all the more as he had a kind of intuitive perception that Kyrle Desborough now, even in the limited circle at Winklestoke, contrived to keep a good deal out of his way. Apart from all this, even when Desborough was absent with his gun, or otherwise occupied with her male guests, Rosamund spoke so much and so often of him, that it soon became evident to Maud and Gertrude that he occupied too much of her thoughts, so true is it that ‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.’

‘Despite all mamma says and would urge,’ said Maud, *apropos* of this matter, ‘that Rosamund can *care* for her husband is most improbable.’

‘That—that she may care for Captain Desborough——’

‘Is most probable,’ interrupted Maud, coldly and steadily, while a startled expression came into the face of Gertrude on finding her own fears put into words.

‘Oh, Maud, there may be nothing on her part but foolish vanity,’ she urged.

‘She was never vain.’

‘Childish giddiness, then?’

‘She was never giddy—girlish, almost hoydenish, perhaps.’

‘But perfectly innocent,’ continued the gentle Gertrude, anxious to plead for the sister whom she loved, and whom their mother had so pitilessly sacrificed to the exigencies of the time.

‘Anyway, this perilous friendship must be stopped.’

‘But she is her own mistress ; mamma made her so.’

‘And the wife of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle,’ added Maud, cresting up her head.

‘Surely he can look to all this,’ said Gertrude, into whose eyes the tears were starting.

‘If the old fool does not, we must and shall !’

‘How hard and harsh you can be, Maud ! With her youth, beauty, and impulsive nature, our poor Rosamund has been put in a trying position.’

‘Yet the world will deal roughly with her.’

‘The world deals hardly with all,’ said Gertrude.

‘The more reason, then, to dread its dictum.’

‘Leave me to deal with Rosamund in this matter, Maud. She will listen to that from me which from others she would deem intolerable.’

Rosamund had not done as men of the world, of the clubs, and as charitable ‘society’ never doubted she would do after her marriage—engaged in furious flirtations and intrigues. Against this she had a safeguard, that had, however, its own peculiar danger. She had fallen in love, as some women do, in silence, in enthusiasm, and without demonstration, with Kyrle Desborough, long before her marriage had been spoken of—Desborough, for whom, had he asked her, she would have faced poverty, pain—yea, death ! It was a wild rash love to give, all the more so that he recked not of it ; but to this abstract idea she had given herself away, handing over her heart and soul, as it were, to the keeping of another.

In separation and absence she had doubtless been getting over it, and in time it must have faded out and passed away ;

but now he had returned they were revolving in the same fatal orbit, and meeting each other again and again ; so no good could come of it. It was not yet too late to evade the precipice ; and though Rosamund could not foresee the future, perhaps Kyrle Desborough was beginning to perceive how blind *he* had been.

Luckless Rosamund ! ‘It is a bitter thing for a woman,’ says a female novelist, ‘to be awakened to the consciousness that she loves a man, who has not merely never asked her to do so, but who possibly would not thank her for the gift ; it is a bitter thing for a deep heart to feel that its waters have been stirred idly—that it has put forth its tendrils of affection to touch but empty air.’ On this matter we prefer to quote a lady. None, save heaven and herself, knew how Rosamund loved Kyrle Desborough ; and even now the girl could not know how far pique at old Sir Ayling, and rage at fate or the world, might carry her.

When Gertrude, after lovingly twining her soft arms round her, and drawing the girl’s sweet face into her neck caressingly, spoke to her of all this, amazement—which certainly was feigned, much of shame that was real, like the little gust of anger that followed it—seemed to inspire Rosamund.

‘People—men like Lawntennison—already watch you and him, my darling ; some whisper, some sneer——’

‘Let them watch and sneer, Gerty, if they dare !’

‘And some—the good-natured—are beginning to look laboriously unconscious——’

‘Of what ?’ asked the girl impetuously.

‘This intimacy between you and Captain Desborough.’

‘He is only a friend—a visitor—like Vere and the rest.’

‘I hope so, Rosamund ; but you have him too much about you.’

‘Too much ! How, you dear, provoking Gerty ?’

‘The whole affair looks too much like a flirtation.’

‘And what mamma would call “bad form.”’

‘Exactly.’

‘Rosamund laughed a little bitterly, and said, ‘It is diffi-

cult to say or know where friendly conversation ends and flirtation begins.'

'Perhaps ; but it is also difficult to know where open flirtation ends and secret love-making begins.'

'Gerty, I do not flirt with him.'

'I fear not,' said Gertrude, sadly and severely.

'I do not know the exact degree of my iniquity, but I know this—that—that——'

'What, my darling ?'

'That I am very—very miserable !'

And, fairly breaking down, Rosamund clung to her sister, as she had never clung to Maud or her mother, and wept.

'I fear I have become very wicked—in thought, at least,' she sobbed, 'and I often wish that—that Kyrle Desborough had never crossed my path again.'

'So do I !' added Gertrude, with fervour.

'Don't despise me for what I say, Gerty, but kiss me.'

'My poor little Rosamund !'

'He will go back to Shorncliffe in a few days, and then all will be over. Till then I cannot quite change my manner.'

'Rosamund, have you no care for appearances ?'

'I don't know,' said the girl, sighing.

'How ?'

'One gets tired of them in time, as of everything in this weary world.'

'While in it we must control our actions and our impulses.'

'Have you forgotten the episodes of "Birdie" ?'

'No, Rosamund, but I have hoped in my heart that you had done so.'

The girl smiled with something of angry scorn, which Gertrude was troubled to see, and again caressed her, on which Rosamund wept again ; but her weepings were all as April showers—she could not keep up the flow : as variable as April itself, she was weeping one moment and laughing the next, with her sweet face hidden in the tender neck of Gertrude, who, having her own secret love, was disposed to be exceedingly pitiful with her child-like younger sister. Yet when

the former left, it was impossible for Rosamund not to ponder and think over her warnings ; and she hoped in her heart that the perils which seemed to menace her—perils of her own seeking—would terminate with Desborough's visit. A blush suffused her cheek, for her own conscience could not acquit her of the fact that a dangerous game was being played—a game in which any one might see that the victory could only lead to one fatal, fatal way. There had been words spoken in tones so low that none apart might hear ; half vows uttered that should not have been ; palpitations that were tender, while hand lingered in hand ; hopes that were not the less daring for being laughingly expressed ; fluttering fears that were born of propriety ; and all the covert tremors that strew the path of every hidden love, but more than all of a love that should not be.

‘ Oh, yes ; I must and shall forget all about it when he goes, thank heaven ! ’ she said half aloud, as if to assure herself by mere sounds ; and then hastily tied on her hat and issued from the conservatory door to join Desborough, who was thoughtfully smoking his brier-root on the terrace before the house.

We have said that, among Rosamund's many plans and expeditions, was one to Quincey Hall, a scheme to which Vere laughingly and warmly acceded. It was to take place on a day subsequent to the conversation just narrated, and for many reasons Gertrude most earnestly wished it to be over—all the more that she felt that to decline being one of the party might be somewhat marked.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE HOME OF THE VERES.

GERTRUDE was intensely provoked with Rosamund for suggesting the expedition to Quincey Hall, which was only distant some twelve miles from Winklestoke. To her it was pre-eminently distasteful, secretly circumstanced as she was, or rather had been, with Vere—loving him still in her heart,

but believing that he too surely had ceased to care for her. Indeed, Sophy Finch never omitted an occasion of assuring her, in the most friendly and jocose manner, on the authority of her brother Toby, how 'terribly bewitched he had been with the Creole beauty.' But apart from all, Gertrude shrank now, sensitively and proudly, more than ever from him, as his accession to rank and fortune roused all her pride of soul, lest even a smile might be misinterpreted; and most studiously she never, on any occasion, gave him the most slender opportunity of being alone with her for a moment. She longed intensely for the termination of his visit to Winklestoke, and angrily regretted that she had permitted herself to be swept there, at the same time, by the impulsive Rosamund. Yet with all this, there was in her mind a bewildering sense of the *presence* of Vere that rendered all she saw, heard, or did, dreamy, indistinct, and difficult to realise or be interested in.

Thus, at first, she had determined that she would not accompany the riding-party to Quincey Hall, and resolved to plead a headache and so forth when the time for departure came. But when she thought of Rosamund and her now dangerous friend, the dread of a probable fiasco compelled her to attend her volatile sister in the capacity of a watchful guardian. Vere had written to the housekeeper and butler to have luncheon prepared for the party at the Hall, where he had only been once for a few days since his return to England; and early in the forenoon the whole party, to the number of a dozen (exclusive of Sir Ayling, who pleaded an engagement), set forth on horseback, attended by two or three grooms; and a happy and merry party they seemed. Vere assisted Gertrude to mount, and had for the first time in his palm the tiniest foot he had ever seen. He then gathered her reins, and put them in her hand; but did not, as she half expected or hoped, take his place by her side.

It was a genuine September morning, with bright sunshine, a cloudless blue sky, clear and tranquil, a haze of heat in the hollows, and insects buzzing in the air. Oblivious alike of

Gertrude's warnings and wishes, and of her own tearful promises, Rosamund, in the highest spirits, led the van of the party with Desborough, whom she summoned to ride by her side. And a charming picture the girl made, in her dark-blue exquisitely-fitting habit, her little hat put coquettishly well forward, with her golden hair coiled, as only Parker's hands could coil it, in masses behind ; the reins firmly gathered in one tiny gauntleted hand, the other by her side with the switch, with which she never required to touch the satin skin of the beautiful animal she rode—the perfection of a lady's pad, which knew so well the silvery voice and caressing hand of its rider. And Desborough, as he looked at her from time to time, thought what a credit such a wife as she would be to any man in the world.

We have hinted that Sophy Finch assumed a species of proprietary in Vere : thus she easily arranged that he should be her cavalier, while Gertrude and Maud fell alternately to the lot of Sir Ascot and Lawntennison, a lisping, *blasé*, and vapid young Englishman, whose sandy hair and freckled skin contrasted unfavourably with the handsome Desborough, who was an Irishman of the dark-eyed and black-haired type.

Inspired by the purity of the air, the beauty of the woodland roads they traversed, and the tone of happiness and pleasure pervading all the party, Gertrude forgot much of her annoyance ; she forgot even the part she had set herself to act, and more than once looked smilingly back to Vere, who rode behind her ; and as she did so her face, her contour, and her bearing on horseback, all vividly brought back the memory of a time, a day of joy and hope, when last he had seen her mounted, and been her escort to the Alder-shot steeplechases—long, long ago it seemed now. And when memory recalled all that, and how dear she was to him then, he felt his heart turn yearningly towards her, and he cantered up to her side ; on which Sir Ascot dropped behind with Miss Finch. Yet it was only to remark, ' How fast the woods are yellowing now !'

In no way had there been the least approach to the 'old,

old story,' though the hearts of both were full of its memory; and Lady Templeton little knew how much of *that* story had been told by the stile in the deep old lane that led to the rectory, on the eventful night subsequent to her ball at Ringwood Hall. Gertrude and Vere had dropped apparently into their first friendly relations with each other, if such could possibly be. Vere had asked her to become his wife; yet it did not seem as if he would do so a second time. Was the link dropped, the tie broken? There could not have been a more embarrassing, yet, to the eyes of the uninitiated, friendly, intercourse between them—a man and woman who had *loved* each other meeting daily as they now met, each deceived as to the secret thoughts of the other, and studiously ignoring the old tie, though something secret and subtle in eye or manner at times brought back the memory of it. So both, misled, continued to play with fire, as it were, and to trifle with their own hearts, under the miserable mask of indifference; and it seemed but too probable that Herbert Vere would go back to Shorncliffe without making any attempt to take up the strands of the old story; and in her pride of heart Gertrude certainly never gave him a chance of doing so.

Yet Maud could see that in the eyes of Gertrude there was a lustreless languor, with a gravity on her eyebrows, an occasional raising of their slender dark lines, and too generally an apathetic indifference of bearing, that betrayed the existence of a repining thought in her heart; and that thought was the memory of *what might have been*; and how, by becoming the exponent of their mother's selfish system and ambitious plans and wishes, she had lost and thrust back upon himself the heart of the only man she had ever really loved. But now that he had so pointedly brought his horse alongside of hers she remembered herself, and became cold and reserved. In truth, she was not without some jealousy of Toby Finch's sister, who—as already stated—appropriated Vere to herself (all ignorant of any prior claim poor Gertrude might have), and had him ever by her side, chattering to him

about the West Indies and the Caribs, the Maroons, Creoles, and Hindoos—for Sophy's ideas of geography were rather hazy ; she played with him, sang at him, made bets with him, and made him do petty errands for her ; for was he not Toby's brother-officer ? and, as Maud said, she seemed quite to deem *her* brother-officer too ; so Vere had to 'go in with it,' as she was a dashing, handsome, and wilful girl. He could not help it ; but the aspect of affairs had widened the breach—if breach it could be called—between himself and Gertrude Templeton.

The riders were drawing near Quincey Hall now, and as they came down the slope of a hill, the bells began to jingle merrily in the square spire of the old Norman village church, and, softened by distance, the silvery peals came pleasantly to the ear.

'Is this in honour of your arrival, Sir Herbert ?' asked Maud Templeton.

'Of yours, rather—and the other ladies,' replied Vere, bowing ; 'the old butler has doubtless arranged this.'

'I have heard that these village bells are famous for their melody,' said Gertrude.

'They were brought from the Low Countries by Sir Horace Vere of Tilbury, and for many a generation since then have rung in and out the epochs of the Veres.'

'Epochs ?' said Gertrude.

'Their births, their deaths, and—their marriages.'

Gertrude changed colour, and slightly checked her horse ; on which Vere added, laughingly, 'They have few pleasant associations for me. I would rather hear the jolly brass drums of the Eighth. But there is the old house in view at last, and to it I bid you all heartily welcome.'

Situated amid the sweetly sylvan and romantic scenery peculiar to the upper portion of the Thames, which there flows through valleys bounded by low hills clothed with beech-woods, and finely studded by many noble mansions, the old Hall stood near the river, and was approached by an avenue from the Reading road. It wound in and out for

more than half a mile among clumps of stately forest trees, the gnarled trunks of which were in many instances covered by masses of ivy and other parasites.

The mansion, some portions of which were very old, had undergone many alterations, and all these had been carried out with more taste and skill than are often to be met with in such cases ; for one portion of the building was so ancient that it afforded accommodation to several peers who attended the parliament at Reading in 1452, and the most modern addition had been made by the late Sir Joseph. And with the dark old walls of the manor-house encrusted with coats armorial, and massed with ivy and luxuriant Virginia creeper, turning now yellow, russet, and red, the garden contrasted well with its long straight terraced walks, the smoothly mown lawn, its quaintly carved sun-dial, whence a broad flight of stately steps descended to the margin of the river.

Before the *porte-cochère* was a magnificent gray granite fountain, in the basin of which the wax-like cups and dark-green leaves of the water-lilies floated, and from the centre of which a bronze triton spouted high in air a clear jet of water from a conch ; and all around were grand old trees, gnarled, vast, and umbrageous—trees that win ‘ man’s reverence by force of contrast with his own ephemeral existence ;’ trees that had been in full leaf when King Henry built Reading Abbey, and long, long before Laud had been spelling through his hornbook in the neighbouring grammar-school.

The Veres had held Quincey Hall in an unbroken line ever since it fell to the lot of an ancestor in the early wars of the Roses, on the attainder of the De Quinceys, and it was and is still one of those splendid and perfectly kept old places which in Britain, but more especially in England, attest the family *tenacity* of the ancient landholders. When or by whom the oaks around it were planted none could tell ; but the glades and the views from the windows were the same that the monks in Reading Abbey, the nuns in the ruined priory on the hill, and the mailed lords who dwelt in the old hall had beheld from generation unto generation.

The old white-haired butler appeared with many other servants at the *porte-cochère*, as the party reined up, and warmly echoed the welcome of Vere, who assisted Sophy Finch—for Gertrude had withdrawn from his side—to alight. Vere might have been pardoned an emotion of vanity in doing the honours of such a place, even temporarily, as he was thankful to do, in a species of scramble or picnic, under the matronage of the volatile Rosamund. There were the library, the chapel, the dining-hall, and the gallery, lined with portraits of the Veres ‘since time out of mind,’ as the old butler had it, with a sly hope that Sir Herbert was not to be the last of the line; and as the old fellow [made this pointed speech, his eye actually wandered inquiringly over the ladies to settle on Maud, and in whatever Vere did or said he and other old servants detected some fancied resemblance to that departed ‘rip,’ Sir Joseph, and with his own memories of that gouty, fractious, and bibulous old tyrant, our hero felt far from flattered.

With the Templetons for his guests, Vere could not help momentarily recalling the bitterness of that time at Aldershot, when the cold-blooded letter of the lawyers came with tidings of that cruel codicil which swept all away from him; and how he had connected that event with the strange meeting and parting he had with Gertrude. And now he was lord of all, and *she* was his guest—his guest and nothing more.

Even as these thoughts occurred to him she was keeping close by the side of Sir Ascot, who with glass in eye was gazing idly along the picture-gallery; and Vere could not know by intuition, though he might have suspected it, that the fact of her being his guest, amid these sudden and brilliant surroundings, made Gertrude in her pride of heart and haughtiness of spirit more cold to him and more open to any attention Sir Ascot might pay her.

Vere gave his arm to laughing Lady Aldwinkle, and led her towards the dining-hall, as the gong in the vestibule had announced the luncheon, which had put the housekeeper, cooks, butler, and gardener, with the luscious produce of his

hothouses, on their mettle to prepare, and which was partaken of jollily and merrily, in oblivion of those whose faces looked down upon it, the Veres of the past—portraits of that brave Cavalier time ‘when the manhood of men was heightened by a graceful dignity of costume, and womanhood was made more lovely by a majestic appropriateness of robes and draperies.’

CHAPTER XLVI.

A REVELATION.

THE protracted repast over, the little party separated ; the gentlemen retiring to the smoking-room, for the invariable ‘weed,’ while the ladies idled in the drawing-room and the conservatory which opened off it ; and it chanced that Vere, in passing through the latter, to order from the gardener some special fruit for Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, heard his own name mentioned by Gertrude to Rosamund. The sisters were seated on the other side of a great flower-stand, and were conversing in a low tone ; but the words that reached his ear compelled Vere to pause, and without intending to act the part of eavesdropper, they rooted him to the spot.

‘Yes, Rosamund,’ said Gertrude, in reply to some remark of her sister, ‘it is most true of Vere and me, and that writer says truly who asserts, that in the whole catalogue of human suffering there is no feeling so agonising as the conviction that the heart of one we love is utterly estranged from us.’

‘It is so strange to see you here, dear Gerty, a visitor, when you might have been mistress. The house is stately ; even mamma, with all her grasping vanity, could desire nothing more. The gardens there, though the season is autumn, are a blaze of colour, the perfection of ribbon bordering ; the lawn smooth as a billiard-table ; and how beautiful are all the grand old trees !’

‘But I *hate* them all !’ said Gertrude emphatically.

‘Hate them—why ?’ asked Rosamund, with surprise.

‘Because when he has all this, I cannot show now that I

love him as I loved him in the past time, when he had only his commission, or little more.'

'Poor Gerty! mamma has taken the bloom from my life; oh, let her not take it from yours!'

Then, after a little pause, Gertrude said, in a low voice, full of sweetness and pathos:

'As I loved him long ago—for it does seem long ago—when mamma's ambitious schemes, with Derinzy's wretched duplicity, nearly broke my heart, so do I love him still; but he is totally indifferent—cold and changed; for doubtless he has ceased to believe in me. What else could I expect? Besides, on that day at Goodwood it was evident to more than me that mamma was making such a dead set at him—conduct so different from her bearing when he was at Aldershot—that every one saw her game. It was most humiliating to me, and has made me assume a cold and distant reserve that is as far from real, as my desire to encourage the attentions of such an empty fellow as Sir Ascot Softeigh. But let us say no more of this.'

And then the sisters began to talk of other things. Vere could scarcely believe his ears; his heart beat like lightning; he made a step forward, as if to join the sisters, and say he scarcely knew what; but as rapidly changed his purpose, and with his mind in a strange tumult of thought, he softly quitted the place. The revelation made so innocently and unconsciously by Gertrude Templeton filled his soul with a great and sudden glow of joy. She loved him still, and had never ceased to do so—her own lips had assured him of it; and that by the force of circumstances, past and present, she, more than even himself, had been acting a part she did not feel. He would pain and test her no more; and he marvelled, but for what he had heard by chance, how long this singular game of apparent indifference would have been played, and how, or in what fashion, it would have ended.

In his present mood he was disinclined to rejoin his friends in the smoking-room, where much foolish laughter and horsey talk were being indulged in. His thoughts fled back to the

past time, when love for her seemed so hopeless and yet so alluring, and he longed to take her to his heart and assure her that he loved her still. But in what fashion was he to broach the subject? To let her know the admissions he had overheard would cover her with confusion; and to address her now, on the strength of his rank and money, might actually, with a girl so proud and reserved, insure a refusal, cost her what it might, especially if she suspected him of having any fancy for the coquettish sister of Toby Finch.

Of two facts he was certain: that Gertrude loved him, and that he had no rival. He walked forth into the grounds and strove to think coherently, while voices and laughter came from the open windows of the smoking-room, and he could hear the tones of Sophy Finch as she sang at the piano, doing her best thereby to lure the gentlemen from 'their den.'

'To linger after what I have heard were to play the fool,' thought Vere; 'surely I can with ease go back to the point where we left off—where we parted in such sorrow—to the dear old story I told her long ago. But little more than a year has passed since then, and already she deems it long ago. My poor Gertrude! How have I been deceiving myself and you! Why did not Rosamund undeceive me? But foolish Rosamund has been too full of her own affairs.'

He longed to cast aside the mask; to take Gertrude's hands caressingly within his own, and to see her look at him again with the old confidence and affection he had last seen in her eyes, in the conservatory at Ringwood Hall, and when they parted in the lane. After the admissions he had overheard and the pathos of her accents, it was impossible to doubt the purity of her love for him; and neither could he doubt that his changed circumstances would render his suit most acceptable to her ambitious mother.

Brief though Vere's promenade necessarily was, years of thought were crowded into it; but as he turned round the terrace in front of the house, he came suddenly upon Gertrude and Rosamund. They had issued from the long flowery aisles of the conservatory, and were now standing on the

summit of the flight of steps that led down to the river, and at the foot of which a pleasure boat was moored. Each sister wore still, of course, her riding-habit, with the skirt thrown over one arm, and Gertrude had loosely tied over her brown hair a laced handkerchief; but the sheeny coils of Rosamund's hair were uncovered, and glittered in the sunshine. How aristocratic and highly-bred the two girls looked, thought Vere, and so in unison with the stately old hall and the balustraded terrace, where the peacocks were strutting to and fro, and the demi-lions, the crest of the Veres, in grotesque old carving, surmounted every pedestal.

'We are admiring the lovely view,' said Rosamund, as Vere threw away his cigar and joined them; and, sooth to say, the landscape was charming in its sylvan beauty. The river made a sweep round the reach on which the old hall stands, and flowed away in its majesty between sloping meadows divided by hedge-rows and belts of timber, dotted by distant village churches half hidden in the dim haze.

Close by were great oak-trees pencilled, as it were, against the sky, and long drooping ashes that almost swept the slow current of the river, but now, deeply tinged with the golden, russet, and brown hues of autumn, rendered deeper in the rays of the declining sun.

'If I unmoor the boat and take you to the bend of the stream,' said Vere, 'you will have one of the finest views on old Father Thames.'

'I wonder who Mother Thames was?' said Rosamund; 'but thanks. Captain Desborough waits me to play him something in the drawing-room. Take Gerty; she has a keener appreciation of fine effects than I.'

Then, with one of her silvery little laughs, Rosamund tripped back to the house, through the conservatory, ere Gertrude could speak.

'Do you care to go, Miss Gertrude?' asked Vere, descending the steps and presenting his hand.

They were now together alone, almost for the first time, and there was a tenderness in the tone and manner of Vere

that stirred a chord in the girl's heart and caused her to colour deeply. To decline would barely be polite ; was he not at least her host at present ? The temptation, perhaps, was strong ; she forgot, we fear, all about the interests of Rosamund just then, and gave her hand to Vere, who felt its touch go straight to his heart ; and as he handed her into the boat, and seated her in the stern, something undefinable came into his eye and voice, at variance with the elaborate politeness and coldly-dignified bearing he had practised of late, and Gertrude felt her colour come and go in spite of herself. Yet as he cast off the painter and shipped a pair of sculls, he was only talking in the most matter-of-fact way—of how many a time and oft he had fished there in boyhood with Sir Joseph and his dead cousins, and where the dace were to be found in the sunny shallows ; the deep still pools where the barbel grubbed in the clay ; and the old tree-roots half bedded in the stream, where the silvery-hued chub watched for stray flies, and so forth ; and as the boat floated slowly on, chiefly with the current, Gertrude became more reassured, and spoke of the beauty of the scene, the foliage skirting the opal-tinted Thames and the emerald-green eminence, where the old mansion towered, with its walls reddened and its oriels ablaze in the light of the declining sun. Vere, pausing, let his sculls rest idly in the rowlocks, and, as the boat floated dreamily on, he gazed at Gertrude, who lifted her eyes to his from the ripples, amid which the water-lilies were floating within the grasp of her pretty hand. She now perceived that his clear dark eyes were bent upon hers with an earnest, deep, and searching and yet most tender gaze, as if he was striving to read the lovely face that had first shed a glory on his life. Gertrude met that gaze, for a moment, with an honest, pure, and unshrinking expression ; and then tears started into her eyes, as her heart heaved painfully, and she turned away, with something of tenderness, something of reproach, much of a deep blush and a species of smile, that died away together when he addressed her.

‘ Gertrude ’—his voice became very tender, and he paused,

while she grew pale, but encouraged by what he had so recently heard, he continued—‘do you remember that evening when we met and parted, in the green lane, before my departure from England?’

‘I could never forget it, as I thought you had done.’

‘Gertrude!’ said Vere, surprised that she should adopt a tone of taunt to him. ‘You remember it, then?’ he urged.

‘With sorrow,’ she replied, in agitation, and with difficulty repressing her tears.

‘And must remember how you forbade me to hope?’

‘I—I was not then the mistress of my own actions.’

‘But you surely are so now?’

‘Not more now than then.’

‘But you do love me still; your own admissions made to Rosamund not many minutes ago assured me of it. I overheard them, my darling,’ continued Vere impetuously, and stooping towards her.

Mingled shame and pride dispelled the colour that pleasure would have brought to her cheek, and her face filled with confusion and perplexity as she strove for a moment to remember *what* she had admitted to Rosamund, and how much he might have heard.

‘Gertrude,’ he added, taking her hands in his (a bank of trees concealed them from the windows of the hall), ‘let us understand each other at last, and throw aside the veil of doubt and mistrust that has hung between us. Let us forget that new position and sudden fortune, which I only value as the means to win you to me, and strive to think of each other as on that night of bitterness when we separated without hope.’

‘Herbert!’

‘Herbert’ on her lips again; but poor Gertrude had, as she spoke, a painful spasm in her delicate throat, compelling her to pause, for love was writhing with pride for the mastery in her breast, and the former conquered.

‘I ask you to forgive me, Herbert, for my share in our painful farewell; it was enforced by my mother. Ah, you know not, and never can know, all I have suffered! And to

ask your forgiveness, too, for that affront, born of—of—all that Sophy Finch wrote so fully to her brother. An explanation which—which——’

‘You knew would reach me?’

‘Yes.’

Gertrude was weeping freely now, and he pressed her passive hands to his lips, and said, ‘Till that day at Goodwood I had been labouring for months under a fatal mistake.’

‘Fatal—how?’

‘We—that is, Desborough and I—regarded you as a wedded wife—the wife of Derinzy.’

‘A fatal mistake indeed,’ said Gertrude, with a smile, for she thought, in her ignorance of the dates, it might explain much that Sophy Finch had told her, and she would rather not have heard; for, doubtless, partly in the love of gossip, partly in rivalry, and perhaps in mischief, that young lady had done much to sow the seeds of mistrust. And now, as Vere once more drew the girl to his breast, all his heart seemed to go forth to her as of old, but with more of hope and happiness than in the past time at Ringwood and Aldershot; and again and again, in terms and phrases broken and incoherent, he assured her that as he loved her then he loved her now, and a joyous rapture spread over her bright little face as she listened to him.

Then she told him, in words difficult to render here, so low was her hesitating tone and so broken her sentences, that the love she had for him had grown and strengthened till it became an absorbing passion, which neither separation, doubt, nor distance could destroy; and yet, she added, in tones more broken still, and with a hot blush on her delicate cheek, she would have made all these admissions to Herbert Vere of the Eighth only, rather than to the owner of Quincey Hall. But could the owner thereof fail to believe her? Ah, no, etc. And so the boat drifted onward, sometimes broadside to the stream, sometimes stern on, and getting foul of the willowed isles and the roots of projecting trees, till the September sun was throwing the shadows of everything far across the land-

scape, and, remembering their twelve miles' ride to Winklestoke, they were compelled to return, and in doing so attempt to conceal from such sharp and watchful eyes as those of Maud the consciousness that possessed them. And though Sophy Finch found herself somewhat studiously ignored by 'Toby's brother-officer,' it was a happy party that cantered back to Winklestoke by the woodland roads in the twilight ; for the sun had now set, the shadows had melted out in murky obscurity, the air had become chill, and a red golden glow lingered at 'the gates of the west.'

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOW KYRLE DESBOROUGH WAS 'SNUBBED.'

IN sweet natural confidence, and in the mutual comparison and confession of past regrets, sorrows, thoughts, and wishes, and in the brilliant anticipation of a bright and seemingly endless future, the last few days of Vere's visit to Winklestoke glided deliciously away, after that auspicious row upon the river—days when more than ever he was learning the amount of good sense, together with gentle sensibility, that existed in the mind and heart of Gertrude Templeton ; happy, happy days, when both were maturing the pleasant, but rather romantic, idea—an old one—that with every human soul is created *another*, for whose companionship through life it is destined, and that from the unfortunate separation, or the never meeting, of these two souls, all the love miseries of the world have arisen.

Rosamund, warm and impulsive Rosamund, congratulated Vere in her own fashion, by clasping his hands within her own and kissing him on both cheeks. Sir Ayling was also warm and most kind, but old-fashionedly dignified. Maud wrote to mamma at once, to tell her of the state of affairs and of the more formal communication she was ere long to receive ; and that good lady at once remembered a newspaper announcement of the proving of the late baronet's last will, and the sums named therein ; after which she studied and com-

pared Vere's pedigree, as given by Sir Bernard and Debrett. Kyrle Desborough, the usually frank and generous soldier, for reasons which may be more obvious to the reader than they were precisely at that time to Vere, was less enthusiastic ; but the latter supposed that was due to his old constitutional cynicism, his doubts about women, and the strange opinions he had been wont to ventilate in past times.

The only person—unfortunately, as the event proved—who was left in the dark as to the progress of affairs was Sir Ascot Softeigh, who hovered about Gertrude as usual when ever opportunity served, which was but seldom now, as he was somewhat puzzled to find.

'My poor Herbert !' said Gertrude one day, as she leant on his arm with her white fingers interlaced thereon, and looked smilingly up in his face ; 'and so Rosamund tells me that it was quite evident, though I saw it not, that you had a jealousy of Sir Ascot ?'

'It certainly assisted me in the game of indifference we were playing to hear the club rumours on one hand, and on the other to see him so often about you, and you sometimes leaning on *his* arm and smiling up at him ; while, as if in corroboration of the rumours, he adopted the airs—in his own languid way—of a privileged dangler, and as such was, I have no doubt, invited here.'

'Mamma suspected, but Sir Ayling knew not, that you loved me once.'

'And love you still, darling. You must never speak in the past tense.'

'Well, we can laugh at all our troubles now, dearest Herbert,' said Gertrude, as she pouted her lovely lip invitingly upward.

'We have been, as Shakespeare says, "true lovers run into strange capers."'

Amid this renewal of love and indulgence in a sweet mutual confidence, that had been so completely shattered, Gertrude had sensitively too much good taste, even in jest, to make the least hint of her rival in the Antilles, if rival she had—an

idea which the girl's heart repelled. It was a subject to be ignored, avoided, and forgotten. But the troubles of Gertrude were not yet over, for ere Vere could either visit Ringwood Hall or write to Lady Templeton with a confidence he did not possess when in his two-roomed hut at Aldershot, there came to pass a very unforeseen catastrophe.

In their mutual preoccupation Gertrude and Vere failed to observe how much now Kyrle Desborough and Rosamund were together, till even Sir Ayling began to remark it, and that his visitor now made various excuses from going forth with his gun as the others did. This is a portion of our narrative which we have much reluctance in recording ; but as it holds an important part therein, and other events turn upon it, we are compelled to refer to it. Mistress of princely Winklestoke and wife of a wealthy baronet though she was, it never occurred to Rosamund that she was to be looked up to, esteemed—or, as it is commonly called, respected—she preferred to be *loved*; and loved she certainly was, for none spoke of her but in a caressing way. Yet a time of change was coming.

Desborough and she were ever together now, on some pretext, all over the place ; in the vineries, pineries, stables, and kennels ; in the labyrinth—for there was one at Winklestoke which beat even that at Hampton Court ; and then there was also the home farm. Was Kyrle crazed, thought Vere, when he began to think of it at all, and was *she*, that they could take an interest in skittish colts, in pigs black and sleek, in ducks and geese and dorkings ; in the rickyard and foldyard with kine knee-deep among straw and litter?—all of which were as little in Kyrle's way as hers, but were objects which afforded a pretence. Had Kyrle become affected by that loose morality which is now said to pervade nearly the whole upper stratum of English society ?

So once more, when amid the sunny joy that filled her own heart some little episode suddenly recalled her former conversation with Rosamund, Gertrude, in her most winning manner, again assumed the part of monitress, and began to

express her growing dislike of Desborough. Rosamund protested, first laughingly, and then tearfully and vehemently, that it all meant nothing ; her actions were open, innocent, and patent to all, so were his ; and that, if Gerty wished it, she would give 'Kyrle' a hint seriously on the subject—she called him Kyrle occasionally, when Sir Ayling was not present—and give him 'a decided snub ;' and her hint and snub took the form that might have been expected. She chose her time, when all were promenading in pairs or groups on the lawn after luncheon, to draw him away with her into the shrubberies ; and in reply to some remark he made that was rather pointed she said, but without the least severity of tone,

'Are you not aware, Captain Desborough, how unwise, how dangerous and wrong it is, for you to look at me and speak to me as you now do ?'

'Dangerous and wrong ?' repeated Kyrle, with a perplexed and amazed air, while twirling his black moustache.

'Yes,' said Rosamund.

'But why, or how ?'

'We, or you, are drifting you don't know where.'

She spoke of him, but thought of herself.

'Has this been hinted to you ?' he asked gravely.

'Yes.'

'By whom ?' he inquired, almost angrily.

'I shall not tell you.'

'Was it Sir Ayling ?' he asked, taking her hand in his, which she did not withdraw.

'It was *not* ; but I have begun to reflect—to think,' she continued, as tears started into her downcast eyes, 'that you ought not, and must not, say the desperate things that you have been saying to me. Your society, Captain Desborough, has shed a golden ray over a not very joyous life ; but—but the time is coming—nay, has come, when we must be mere friends—or part for ever !'

Kyrle listened to her in a species of angry silence, while an expression of sorrow replaced the smile on his face, and they walked slowly forward without speaking ; and as friends

were close by he relinquished, with reluctance, the pretty hand he had held caressing, all heedless that a marriage-hoop was on it.

She could not deny to herself, in her heart of hearts, that hitherto she had looked forward, with a species of exciting and guilty pleasure, to her rides and rambles with Desborough. Very perilous for the impulsive girl was this companionship, though as yet no dire transgression in word or thought, far less in act, had startled her soul to a sense of the whirlpool that might drag her down. There was, apart from the secret love she had borne him, a charm in Desborough's society, which she could not and cared not to relinquish, but with reluctance and sorrow. But a time came when he was so forgetful of all the world that he addressed her as no man has a right to address the wife of his host or friend; and singularly enough, the time chosen was that in which she had resolved to 'snub' him, but found herself lured, or impelled, into making an admission from which she might recede, but could never revoke. She recalled the scene in the conservatory, and the passionate letter she had written on the night he marched from Aldershot, and which she destroyed; but now, in broken accents and with quivering lip, she told him, under the influence of the most imploring and tender questioning, the tenor of its perilous contents—her wild love for himself, and her black despair at the marriage about to be forced upon her.

'Poor girl, poor darling!' he whispered; 'why did you not send it to me? But it would have been too late; we were at sea next day.'

'Too late, or not,' said she, weeping bitterly the tears he longed, but dared not, to kiss away, 'my soul shrank from it then.'

As Desborough gazed now passionately on Rosamund, there came into her soft face a beseeching, clinging, and unprotected expression of distress, mingled with shame and confusion. He now pitied her from his soul, and would have taken her tenderly in his arms, but she recoiled a pace or two.

'Good Heavens !' thought he, 'what a fool I have been ! how blind ! How one might live and love and lead a creature like this all round the world with him ! However, I must leave this, and at once, for her sake, if not for my own.'

Desborough's thoughts almost took the form of words ; but, though he made the resolution, it began and ended there.

'And you married ?' he asked softly, after a pause.

'As you know, in despair.'

He sighed.

'It was a species of relief from the domestic tyranny and, monetary necessities of mamma ; and after it was all—all over, I thought I should find a kind of stagnant peace combined with——'

'Happiness ?'

'How can *you* say so ?'

'Time will reconcile you.'

'It will neither reconcile me nor avenge me !' said the girl impetuously. 'You, Kyrle, can see how miserable—with all its luxury and splendour—is the life from which you might have saved me.'

'I ?'

'You—you surely loved me when at Aldershot ?' asked Rosamund, growing very pale.

'I was foolish enough——' stammered Kyrle, fairly taken aback by the question, as he recalled how perpetually he had played with and made a mere jest of her.

'Foolish enough—to what ?' asked Rosamund sharply, putting up her parasol to shade her face.

'To hope that *you* might love me ; but there was Lady Templeton,' he added, feeling that somehow he did not shine.

'I know—I know,' said Rosamund bitterly ; 'but I wish for some one to love me. I would that I were your younger sister, Kyrle. But here come Sir Ayling and Maud ; let us join them.'

And with faces composed and made up for the occasion, they met those who approached, and it was evident the old baronet looked both blankly and darkly ; but whether Maud

had been suggesting anything to him it was impossible to say. And while such avowals had been made and passionate speeches uttered, to any casual observer the two seemed simply to have been admiring the shrubs and flower borders.

Kyrle Desborough was flattered, puzzled, and perhaps alarmed by the crisis that had come. He sympathised with the poor little golden-haired victim, and was sensible of the terrible power he had over her for good or for evil ; but this sympathy was blended with a dangerous love that allured him on one hand, while, as a man of honour, he shrank from what his own thoughts suggested on the other ; but many a man of honour is weak enough when a pretty woman, who tells him that she loves him, is concerned ; and Rosamund, on her part, began to blush for the result of the interview, and on the first occasion wept over it as the true fear of her sex took possession of her—the fear that she had—as she undoubtedly *had*—taken the initiative, and encouraged the changed bearing of Kyrle Desborough towards herself.

But in public his bearing was now altered too ; he escorted her no more in private rambles or promenades in the garden or grounds ; he no longer chose her as a partner at croquet or lawn-tennis ; he permitted others to turn the leaves of her music and accompany her in duets, to sit by her side or hover about her. He spent more of his time with a gun in the preserves, in the billiard-room, or even in listening to the querulous babble of Sir Ayling, whom he had learned intensely to dislike, and who, old as he was, remarked a change in Desborough which he could not define, and half feared that ‘something had been up’ between the captain and his impulsive little wife. A sense of honour and humanity, of religion and generosity, told the heart of Kyrle Desborough that he ought to flee the temptation—to shun the presence of Rosamund, and take his instant departure from Winklestoke on any pretence ; but so weak may a strong man’s resolution become, that he, the once-soured misogynist, had become helplessly besotted by a love of the very girl of whom he had so frequently made a jest.

'I am so glad, pet, to see by the altered bearing of Captain Desborough—altered so much for the better—that you have taken my advice,' said Gertrude to Rosamund.

'Your advice?' queried the latter dreamily.

'Yes; and made him know his place, which I hope he will keep till he goes. Vere, I know, must resent his late manner to you; but men are loth to assume the part of monitors to each other, and admonition is too often resentfully taken. But how came this change about?'

'I spoke to him on the subject.'

'Spoke to him—remonstrated? Surely that was not a wise or proper course to take!'

'I took it, however, Gerty,' was the quibbling reply.

'And the result?'

'Is what you see; he does not come near me now.'

'That in itself may become too remarkable. But *what* did you say?' asked Gertrude softly, and with genuine anxiety.

'Don't ask me, Gerty,' replied her sister, a little sullenly, and then added, with a sigh, 'Ah, me! all marriages are *not* made in heaven—the old saw is false.'

'What does this mean?'

'Where was *mine* made? You do not answer; shall I tell you?'

'Yes.'

'In Ringwood Hall,' said Rosamund, with a bitter little laugh.

'Do not adopt this tone, for heaven's sake,' said Gertrude, with alarm and anxiety, as she lifted up Rosamund's face and kissed it, just as she was wont to do when she was a child, and yet there was but two years of difference between the sisters. 'Consider, dearest Rosamund, consider, evil alone can come of this spirit if adopted and encouraged.'

'Then, if evil come, let it lie at mamma's door,' replied Rosamund, with growing bitterness. 'My marriage, wherever it was made, was a bargain between Sir Ayling and her. I was sold to him, like a horse at Tattersall's or anywhere else. But that woman to whom he so often sends money—I

once saw his cheque-book—maddens me, Gerty—"Birdie, at the Rhodendrons, Bayswater," that is the creature's address—maddens me ; and yet I do not love him !

The truth was, perhaps, that Rosamund was endeavouring to nurse an emotion of indignation against Sir Ayling as an apology for her own wandering thoughts ; but sliding from a chair to her sister's feet on the carpet, she drew an arm of Gertrude round her neck, and caressed the soft white hand that lay upon her tear-wetted cheek.

'I dress—I receive—I am civil—polite to all,' she urged half hysterically ; 'what right has he to expect more of me ?'

'That for the future and for ever you will avoid Captain Desborough,' said Gertrude gravely.

'Why did he bring him here ?'

'By some fatal chance, mistake, I cannot explain. But it showed that he was without the least suspicion, and placed implicit confidence in you.'

'Oh, what an odious subject this is, and how humiliating !'

'Humiliating indeed,' said Gertrude, unable to restrain her tears. 'O Rosamund, I never thought to have to admonish you on such a subject as this.'

'I am very bad, naughty, horrible, I suppose ; but I won't be worse, darling Gerty, I promise you ; I won't be worse than I am. Only don't let Maud attack me on the subject ; her sneers would drive me wild. Kiss me again, Gerty.'

'My poor innocent lamb !' said the other caressingly.

'I am *not* innocent !' exclaimed Rosamund, bitterly and impetuously. 'I know my own thoughts, and they are wicked in spite of me ; yes, wicked, Gerty. My self-respect is gone ; I do not quite despise myself, but I fear that in time others may come to despise me. O Kyrle ! Kyrle !'

This incoherent speech was arrested by a passionate burst of weeping which terrified Gertrude, who lifted her eyes upward and said, 'In three days, thank God, he will be gone, never more to enter Winklestoke, if I can prevent it.'

But Gertrude little foresaw what was to happen in that brief space of time, and how terrible a cloud was to overshadow her own brief gleam of sunshine.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SUSPICION.

SOMEWHAT relieved by this outburst and by her confession, though very much ashamed of both, even before her favourite sister, Rosamund strove to take heart and to reflect, with a species of sullen and desperate composure, that when the temptation was removed from her, by the departure of Desborough, she would forget—but that was perhaps not easy—the episode of ‘Birdie,’ and strive to do her duty as the wife of old Sir Ayling, who up to this time had doated—how wearily to herself the girl alone knew—on her. Yes, yes, she would be faithful in thought as well as word and deed, and, however difficult the task, would strive to honour and obey. Alas, she could not love him with the love of which she felt capable elsewhere. But in some fashion she hoped, by her conduct and bearing, to make amends for what she withheld from him; and even while she repined in her heart, she resolved never again to let its beating quicken as her eyes met those of Desborough, or as his hand touched hers. During the remainder of his visit, and whenever or wherever they might meet again in society, she would avoid him, and adopt the mere friendly tone and bearing he had assumed of late.

But all these wise resolutions had been adopted too recently; for the eyes of Sir Ayling had become suddenly opened, and at a garden-party, on the very day after the visit to Quincey Hall, he had overheard a wicked old colonel say in a low voice to some one :

‘There goes that fellow Desborough of the Eighth, whispering into Lady Aldwinkle’s pretty ear discourses as artful as any the serpent ever whispered to Eve.’

‘Yes,’ drawled the other, a fox-hunting squire with a fast reputation; ‘married folks are always the last, don’t you know, to hear the little tarradiddles which affect them most and are current among their doocid good-natured friends in society. But how old Aldwinkle is hoodwinked—’

He failed to catch the last words, as the laughing speakers detected his vicinity, and moved hastily away : but the scales fell from his eyes. A hundred things, which he had deemed mere hoydenish girlish folly, and had even laughed at, now came to memory in new colours, and with gigantic proportions ; and hence it was that on that very morning, when he caught Rosamund replacing the rose in her bosom by one that had fallen off Desborough's lapel—replacing it with a fond dreamy smile on her face—that he banged to the room-door as he withdrew, much to her surprise, as that movement has always a world of angry meaning in it. So when the bearing of the two suddenly changed to a bearing of distance and indifference, and he saw that there were times when Kyrle noticed Lady Aldwinkle just as much as he did the Maltese pug that nestled at her feet, he thought how 'still waters run deep,' and his suddenly excited jealousy waxed deeper, and he would rather almost have seen the former flighty manner resumed.

Many of his own old experiences of stolen moments, of acts and words assumed and done to hoodwink unsuspecting Benedicks, came torturingly back to memory now, opening up whole mines of jealous thoughts. The game that he had played with others then, might by others be played with him now. He knew too much of what he had done, and this very knowledge bore its crop of brambles now ; he suddenly found himself hung on tenter-hooks, and had a horrible fear not of what was actually happening then, but of what *might* come to pass ere long. He remembered how he used to laugh at, mock, and revile the very jealousy he was wont to excite in others, in the days when he cared not to believe in the immaculate virtue of any woman, and believed that with time and opportunity he might wile an empress from her throne.

He was seated in a luxurious easy-chair in his library, full of these angry, fierce, and bitter thoughts—thoughts that were all the more agonising to a man of his age, and that made this said soft springy seat like Damien's bed of steel—when

Rosamund, fresh from the recent exciting interview with Gertrude, and after bathing her eyes, crept coyly to his side, with her mind full of good intentions. He eyed her gloomily, but, as usual, put an arm round her ; and then it occurred to his suspicious mind that, with all her outward air of wifely duty, inwardly she shrank from the embrace of that encircling arm and the pressure of the long white diaphanous hand.

‘You have had tears in your eyes,’ said he sharply ; ‘tears about what?’

‘Tears of pleasure, Sir Ayling—think of the happiness of Gertrude. Look, dearest, there she goes with Vere across the lawn ; how happy they must be, talking of themselves and their own plans!’

They were, at that precise moment, talking of *her* and her too probable peril.

‘He leaves us soon ; shall we,’ she said hesitatingly, ‘ere they go, give him and Captain Desborough——’

‘D—n Captain Desborough!’ interrupted Sir Ayling, withdrawing his hand, and starting as if the sound of the name had stung him. ‘We have had enough of this sort of thing ! Do you suppose, madam, that I am going to permit this man to be the hero of all our entertainments, the central figure of our circle, to hang about you as he has done for some time past, and to cause your name to be associated with his own obscure one?’

Startled at first by this sudden and coarse outbreak, which in tone, temper, and diction was all so unlike the usually calm, cold, unimpressionable, and aristocratic character of her husband, Rosamund shrank back ; and then an expression of the deepest pain and humiliation crossed her soft fair face, less at the actual words than their general import and *all* they implied.

After a pause the old man took the girl’s tremulous white hand in his, and said, but coldly, ‘I believe you, Lady Aldwinkle——’

‘Do call me Rosamund!’ she exclaimed.

‘Well, I believe you to be all that a virtuous wife should

be, even as I hope I am an affectionate and honourable husband.'

Rosamund thought of 'Birdie,' but only asked, 'What do you mean, Sir Ayling?'

'Simply this : that I am neither old enough to be a doating donkey nor young enough to be vain and uxorious, and I am not in any way, I hope, a fool. I, with others, overheard a conversation—there was nothing covert about it—between you and this Captain Desborough the other evening. I thought it peculiar at the time ; but I can see its full significance *now*.'

'A conversation !' said Rosamund, growing very pale, and striving to recall it, but in vain ; 'on what subject?'

'A very singular one for any lady to discuss ; and I can't think how you permitted yourself to get upon it with such a person.'

'And what was it?'

'The length that a married woman—a modest one, let us hope—might let her esteem—ha, ha, madam, it was called *esteem*—go for a man who was not her husband.'

Rosamund now coloured deeply. She did remember the conversation in question ; but there had been nothing covert about it ; it had been carried on laughingly, in a gay, certainly rather French, kind of way ; but the recurrence to it now, with the tone of Sir Ayling and the cold gleam in his eyes, made her feel sick, piqued, angry at heart and resentful too.

'Now leave me, Rosamund, and these matters shall be recurred to no more.'

And opening the library door, the tall thin old gentleman bowed her out as deferentially as if she were a stranger ; but coming, as it did, immediately after the earnest warnings of her sister, this interview with Sir Ayling completely crushed and half terrified Rosamund.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE HOLLY HEDGE.

CHARMED with the great sisterly love of Gertrude, which had much of a mother's care in it, Vere—whose intercession she had actually condescended, with much confusion and hesitation, to seek in the interest of Rosamund—sought, after sunset, a lonely part of the spacious and magnificent garden, to think over what he should say on the subject; he was full of honest and genuine indignation at Kyrle—all the more when the anxious and loving face, the tearful eyes, and tremulous tones of Gertrude were remembered. He had two other matters to think of amid the smoke of the indispensable cigar, as he threw himself upon a rustic bench in a snug corner, screened by one of the dense and lofty holly hedges, which, like leafy walls, intersected the garden at regular distances, and these were, writing to his solicitors at Gray's Inn, Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, concerning his engagement with the late Lord Templeton's daughter, and the monetary eventualities it involved, and also whether he should write to or visit—he preferred the former—Lady Templeton on the subject, as he never for a moment doubted having her full and warm consent *now*.

Amid the three subjects in hand, he fell into a somewhat deep reverie for him, and other ideas mingled with them. Chance had thrown him into close association with Virginia Bellingham. Chance—yes, it is the old story—and a new inspiration filled the heart that Gertrude had seemingly thrust back upon itself; but *now* Vere thought with tenderness and enthusiasm, while every pulse quickened and fibre thrilled at the delicious conviction, that he had learned how great was the difference between a first and all-absorbing love, such as his for Gertrude, and the passing passion—for such he deemed it—he had for poor Virginia Bellingham, considering not incorrectly that love and passion may be *two*. Why was it that at that time, with the speed of light and thought, his memory flashed back to the glorious summer

beauty of that once happy abode in the Antilles, embosomed among a thousand luscious fruits and brilliant flowers ; to the bright and pale but pensive face he had seen, and the alluring voice he had heard there—the voice that, save in dreams, would come to his ears no more ; and to that awful episode in the wild cane-brake and by the cliff that overhangs the sea ? Was it to punish him for letting his thoughts so wander, or to nerve him for what he was now to hear, that chance did all this ?

On the other side of the thick holly hedge two persons were slowly promenading to and fro, and pausing ever and anon. Through the thick leafy wall not a vestige of their figures could be seen, though their voices could be distinctly—alas, too distinctly—heard, and they were those of Gertrude Templeton and the vapid Sir Ascot Softeigh.

‘Oh, that happened long ago, as you may remember,’ the latter was saying ; ‘the pleasures of memory——’

‘Are not equal to those of hope,’ interrupted Gertrude, with a silvery laugh.

‘True—aw—aw—so. I don’t care for ever thinking of anything that happened long ago. You refused me that little request then——’

‘It was only a dance, I think.’

‘Well, you won’t give me now that rose from your breast?’

‘I have not said so ; did you ask it ? why should I refuse it ? There.’

‘Thanks—oh, so much !’

‘Don’t kiss it so ere you put it in your lapel.’

‘Why ?’

‘Because it is simply absurd ; and how foolish to beg a rose from me, more especially if you knew all ?’

‘Don’t I know all ?’ asked Sir Ascot, in a low and lisping voice, which he meant to be tender.

‘No ; not yet, but you shall in time.’

‘I am all impatience.’

‘It is and was no engagement, Sir Ascot ; be assured that of such folly I am certainly free.’

‘Thank heaven ! I am so glad to hear you say so—and one, aw—aw—full of such pure joy. But come now, you certainly encouraged the poor fellow ?’

‘I did not,’ replied Gertrude emphatically, while Vere rose in bewilderment and strove softly to retire, but his feet seemed to have taken root in the gravelled walk ; ‘how dare you say so ?’

‘Pardon me.’

‘He would come here on leave.’

‘After you ?’

‘After me ? I suppose so. I can no more help his admiration than yours.’

‘Come now, that is too bad, really ; for I knew that Lady Templeton——’

‘Whatever mamma may have thought or intended, or may yet think or intend——’

‘Well ?’

‘You quite mistake the whole situation ; and *his* attachment to another girl, beneath him every way in rank, and at a distance from here——’

(‘Poor Virginia in her island home—her watery grave !’ thought Vere, as the speakers moved away a few paces. ‘Enough !’ he muttered ; ‘we know each other now. O my God, all I have ever loved !’)

‘I have then hopes, Miss Gertrude ?’ said Sir Ascot, as they turned back.

‘I have not said so.’

‘But he—that other——’

‘Has eventually none, whatever he thinks,’ said Gertrude, laughing, yet with annoyance in her tone.

(‘None ! and she dares to laugh at me thus, and with *him* ?’ thought Vere, who felt stunned by all this new and terrible revelation.)

‘None, say you ?’

‘I repeat that Colonel Derinzy never had.’ These *seven* words were unheard by Vere, who slipped away softly, and left the garden, luckily unseen, as his unsteady steps re-

sembled those of a blind or intoxicated man, for the awful conviction came suddenly upon him that all was over now for ever. From Gertrude's own lips he had learned that she had been fooling him ; that she was playing fast and loose with her engagement, indifferent whether she were free or not from it, and encouraging hope in the man to whom she confided all this—Sir Ascot Softeigh—the man whose attentions to her had been so remarked, he had heard on various hands, encouraged by her mother as Derinzy had been till the viscount's marriage with 'that young person at Homburg.' Gertrude was faithless, false, hollow-hearted ; and the resumed dream of Vere's life had utterly faded out !

'This is the second time I have been compelled to overhear what was not, *apparently*, intended for my ear, and I thank heaven that I have done so. By a terrible but fortunate chance her true character stands revealed now. And now to quit this accursed Winklestoke, and at once !'

Black sorrow, rage, and mortification filled his heart. It was dusk ere this sad revelation was made to him ; and as he hurried towards the stabling, the windows of which were becoming radiant with lights now, he stumbled suddenly upon Kyrle Desborough.

'Just in time, old fellow,' said the other cheerily ; 'there goes the dressing-bell for dinner, and I want to speak to you about that awful hub of my Lady Aldwinkle.'

This was the first time Vere had ever heard Desborough adopt a style so bad ; but it ceased to excite his surprise then.

'How—why?' he asked mechanically.

'He has been singularly and elaborately cold, though polite, to me to day. Old age has its privileges, and I suppose a gust of jealousy is one of them.'

This was also the first time that Desborough—a well-bred man—had ever indulged in such a sneer, and he could have bitten off his tongue next moment for doing so ; but Vere, too full of his own bitterness, heard him as though he heard him not, and hastened away to conceal his face, which was all a-quiver with absolute mental pain. His first thought and

chief horror was the knowledge and necessity that he must meet Gertrude at dinner, and take—as he had lately done—his place by her side; but he was spared that trial, as she did not appear. Maud apologised for her absence, saying that she had that ailment so convenient for ladies—a headache, which was indeed the case. She had undergone much ‘worry’ concerning Rosamund and Kyrle Desborough, and dreaded to witness the probable bearing of Sir Ayling to one or both at dinner; but in these points she was mistaken, as the baronet was a scrupulously well-bred man, and though he had taken fire, none could have detected the slightest change in his manner to his now unwelcome guest. The latter felt and knew there was a change, and began to consider the day and hour of his departure.

Rosamund looked, as usual, beautiful and radiant; yet she was thinking again and again, amid the courtesies of the splendid dinner-table, how hard it was to dress and look like other people, and, like them, to talk on indifferent things, when searching and watchful eyes were upon her, and while her heart was a prey to a love she trembled to acknowledge even to herself, to secret agitations and fears, she knew not of what! Kyrle’s eyes were upon her as usual, and she was under all their influence, while affecting to eat and respond to the mild platitudes of the Reverend Deogratias Guffin, the Rector of Winklestoke. In her own actions she was free now, so far as her mother was concerned; occasionally half desperate and indifferent as to what her husband thought. So, with regard to Kyrle Desborough, she was somewhat given to blend dreamily and confusedly the unwedded past with the present in her mind. He, we have stated, had been much of a misogamist; he had been disappointed in early life—how, not one of the mess ever knew, but, like many men, though he could be severe enough upon the supposed goodness and virtue of women for whom he cared nothing, or whom he had ceased to care for, the case became very different in that of Rosamund Aldwinkle, wherein his heart, pride, or whatever it was, became too fatally concerned,

The repast that evening was marked by singular constraint, against which Rosamund bore up in vain. Though politely attentive to all, Desborough, like his host, was somewhat silent. To Vere the whole dinner seemed an unreal dream, a phantasmagoria that might evaporate like a dissolving view ; and certainly, in the accurately attired young baronet, with the faultless collar, cuffs, shirt-front, and diamond studs, and with his apparent calm and easy *insouciance* of manner, none could have recognised the pale and agitated and utterly wretched fellow he seemed to himself but a short time before in his dressing-closet. To him Sir Ascot talked incessantly, and he seemed in high spirits. He had won a 'pot of money' on a favourite horse ; but Vere, who had not the key to this, attributed his hilarity to a very different cause.

During the dessert a tiny note from Gertrude was presented to him by the butler on a silver salver. He paled more for a moment at the sight of her handwriting, but quietly put it in his pocket, to peruse at a future time. The moment he could leave the table without attracting attention he did so, and hastening to his room, ordered his valet to 'pack his traps' and follow him on the morrow to Shorncliffe. He hastily changed his clothes for others to travel in, and while doing so, in the tumult of his thoughts, forgot to read the note of Gertrude. When he remembered to do so it was searched for in vain and could nowhere be found, and he was certain that he had not dropped it.

'No matter,' he muttered through his clenched teeth ; 'now to be off like a bird.'

He dashed off a hasty note of farewell, thanks, and excuses to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, another to Desborough, and quitting the house unseen, walked quickly by the nearest path to the quiet little station of Winklestoke.

CHAPTER L.

SHORNCLIFFE CAMP.

As if to suit or soothe the impatience of his then mood of mind, the train came rushing into the station just as he

reached it. He procured a compartment for himself, and stretched at full length on the softly-cushioned seat, strove to think, to ponder, whether he had been rash, or taken a wrong step, while his temples throbbed and his brain seemed on fire. But a few minutes ago he had been seated at that splendidly-appointed and glittering dinner, and now he was coursing at the rate of forty miles an hour through the blurred and darkened landscape in the gloom of a starless September night, and he felt like one in a dream. Of what value now seemed his ancestral baronetcy, the storied splendour of Quincey Hall, and his thousands per annum? for all things are comparative, and Sir Ascot's fortune was double what his was. Now the possession of these good things, by removing the only insurmountable barrier to their marriage—insurmountable at least in the eyes of Lady Templeton—was rendered valueless and nugatory by the faithlessness and inconstancy of Gertrude herself; by her cool and calculating knavery of heart, for such he deemed it, in giving this secret preference to a wealthier man. How long did she mean to continue this game of duplicity, and in what fashion did she mean to undeceive him? He was much happier when he was a simple subaltern of the Eighth, when far away in Central India, and knew not that there was such a creature as Gertrude Templeton in the world. Well, who could tell? he might be jolly and happy again; and he laughed, but what a joyless laugh it was! Then he thought in this fashion:

‘I have been a dolt, a fool, the tool and the plaything of all these people, else why was Lady Templeton so warm to me at Goodwood, though so arctic to me when I saw her before; and why did Sir Ayling invite me to his house, but to throw me in *her* way again? Why did Rosamund, so oddly, under all the then circumstances, plan that visit to the old hall, but to bring about all that came to pass? Purposely these two practised actresses spoke as they did, that I should overhear and be duped into the snare! Kyrle, ass as he seems to be making of himself now, was right in his estimate of the whole heartless and selfish set. Be the club rumours what they

may, true or false, I shall not enter stakes with a yahoo like Sir Ascot, but hedge at once. Fool that I was not to remember all Kyrle's past advice ! *His* advice ! Bah, is not poor Kyrle making a worse fool of himself ? That pair are sure to come to grief ere long. Well, I shall laugh at the mischief, perhaps,' thought he, as the train sped on. ' Why does Nature teach such charming duplicity to women—young girls even ? By Jove, they are subtle as serpents, inscrutable as enigmas, things no fellow can understand ! Only watch a pretty one, with her softly-lidded and long-lashed eyes cast down, listening to some doating and deluded fool, while conning over his words and cunningly communing with her own thoughts and appraising his value. Well, I have crossed the *pons asinorum*.'

While thinking these bitter things, it never occurred to Vere how oddly he and Kyrle Desborough had precisely changed places, so far as opinions went.

' She never cared for me at any time, and now has striven by a coquetry which I knew not she possessed, and a feigned regard, to lure me to her feet and test her power ; while the man she really loves—if she is capable of loving at all—is, of course, that solemn puppy, Sir Ascot. Well, I have only my own folly, my own honest simplicity, to blame for it all—unless—unless——'

He paused. Could it be that he had overdone, or been too real at first in his apparent indifference ? He remembered now that when he first went to Winklestoke, Sir Ayling, who was not in the secret of the past, had laughingly told him that Sir Ascot had been long so devoted to Gertrude, and that in walking or riding, etc., she seemed ever to prefer his society, it was evident the affair must take a matrimonial turn.

With the elaborate ingenuity of self-torture he recalled, in every form of exaggeration, her cool—for it did seem cool now, and yet it was not—announcement to him at the stile in the lane that his love, blind and passionate though it was, could only be deemed desperate and hopeless ; he recalled again her too ready adoption of his supposed intrigue with

the keeper's daughter, and her direct cut of him on the morning of his departure, and then the perfect equanimity with which she met him at Goodwood ; and now, after the maturest consideration, he believed that he was but the victim of a tricky double-dealing damsel, trained to match-making by her mother, and desirous only of having more than one beau 'to her string,' or a richer man than himself. And for hours of the night these angry and bitter thoughts agitated him, long after Charing Cross had been left behind and the myriad lights of London had faded in darkness and distance, as the swift train sped on and on, by the green woods and chalky banks of Chislehurst, pleasant Sevenoaks (where the seven great trees are no more), gay Tunbridge with all its villas, Staplehurst on its wooded acclivity ; and then the train glided, snorting and clanking, amid the flashing of many-coloured lamps, the clang of bells, and stir and bustle, into the junction at Ashford ; and he reached the camp at Shorncliffe just as the drums began to beat *veille* ; and as he heard the well-known sound echoing amid the streets of huts, days instead of hours seemed to have elapsed since he left Winklestoke, and he began to hope that he should again slide into the tenor of his old life.

Meanwhile, at Winklestoke his absence was not discovered till the party met at breakfast, some hours after he had taken possession of his hut in the regimental lines.

'Gone—why?' asked Desborough, who found the valet packing Vere's things, and was the first to be informed of his departure ; 'what the devil is up now?'

'Don't know, sir ; but my master seemed **very** much put out about something,' replied the servant.

'He says nothing of that in this note to me ;' and in his perplexity Kyrle beat the ashes out of his carefully-coloured meerschaum on his high brass military heel, but with such vehemence as to endanger the existence of the former cherished object of art.

When the event was announced to her, Gertrude felt her

heart die within her, and she remained silent amid the many expressions of regret and still more of surprise expressed by all. Gone so suddenly, so discourteously, and without a word or note or message to her, verbal or otherwise, in explanation or in reply to her missive, which the butler had to assure her again and again he had punctually delivered. It appeared to her by turns startling, terrifying, bewildering, and humiliating, especially when she caught the cold eyes of Maud fixed scrutinisingly upon her. She knew or suspected that he had, just as dusk closed in, seen her with Sir Ascot; but what of that? She little knew what he had overheard, or, rather, half heard. A secret torrent of hot tears, angry tears too, failed to relieve her, because they were unavailing.

‘May he not have gone over to Quincey Hall?’ suggested Sophy Finch, who, for her own private reasons, felt a deep interest in the movements of ‘Toby’s brother-officer.’

‘Oh no, certainly not,’ said Sir Ascot, who had few ideas to offer on any subject; ‘the shooting is bad, he told me, unless—aw, aw—he cared for wabbits.’

‘Besides, the man would never leave us to shoot alone,’ said Sir Ayling rather haughtily, as he tossed Vere’s brief note into the fire behind him.

‘What can it all mean?’ asked Lawntennison, eyeing all in succession through his glass.

‘Mean—why, that there’s a woman in the case—a bit of muslin—what else?’ whispered Sir Ascot.

Low though he spoke, the annoying suggestion reached the quick ear of Gertrude, but without effect; and little did she suspect that she herself was the woman implicated.

Rosamund summoned the valet, and questioned him closely as to whether his master had recently received any telegrams or letters. But neither had come for him; Sir Herbert had simply gone away, leaving orders for him to follow to Shorncliffe. It was altogether most mysterious and unaccountable.

With emotions of amazement, perplexity, sorrow and then growing indignation, Gertrude waited in daily expectation of some letter to explain the reason of this sudden departure,

the strange silence of Vere, and the wholly unaccountable situation of their affairs ; but days, weeks, and months passed on, and no letter came. She might have written personally to demand the explanation to which she deemed herself entitled, but was withheld by the information she received through Sophy Finch that at the camp 'he was well, and seemed jolly as ever.'

After a time that young lady returned home. Gertrude saw and heard nothing of Kyrle Desborough ; so the *Army List* alone informed her that Vere was still with the Eighth or King's, vegetating and no doubt shivering on the bleak heights of Shorncliffe. What or *who* could have come between them—between them after all? Had any unsisterly malevolence on the part of Maud? But, oh no, mischievous as she knew her sister to be, she could not adopt that idea. Sophy Finch, then? But she could not think that either.

Any way, she could not, and would not, write in her naturally angry pride of heart ; so the bitter anxious time stole slowly past, and she returned to Ringwood Hall.

Lady Templeton heard of the sudden turn matters had taken with more genuine concern than she ever displayed before ; but angry pride precluded her from moving in the affair, and more than once Maud said, 'Such a tiresome couple you are—at sixes and sevens again ! Well, mamma cannot be to blame in this matter ; then *who* is ?'

'Not I, be assured,' replied poor Gertrude, drowned in tears.

Her thoughts, unlike those of Vere, were more full of sorrow than of anger. He had a basis for the latter ; she had no clue whatever ; and these thoughts he nursed in his wretched hut at bleak Shorncliffe, for there the camp accommodation is, if possible, worse than at Aldershot.

Kyrle Desborough did not return immediately to headquarters ; he procured an extension of leave, and on pretext of having some cub-hunting in September, had betaken himself, with his horses, Vere did not know precisely where, but he shrewdly suspected to some rural hotel not a hundred miles distant from Winklestone.

He did not know what was going on in that quarter, and he scarcely cared to know. He did not attempt to interfere or offer advice, so far as in him lay. Yet he ought to have remembered Rosamund's unloved wedded fate on one hand, and Kyrle's great temptation on the other ; and that 'a man requires to be something more than stoical to push away the fair head that uninvited is laid upon his shoulder, to disengage his hand from the soft clinging clasp of feminine fingers, and reminding their owner to be a little less free with him, run the risk of being called a brute and a bear, amid tears of disappointment, for his pains.'

'Such shuttlecocks we are in the hands of Destiny !' he would think, when he got rid of Toby Finch, Clive, Prior, and others, and had his hut to himself ; 'befooled and degraded ! Thank heaven, I did not commit myself by writing to that cold-blooded old woman at Ringwood Hall ! Why did Gertrude write me that note, when she might naturally have expected to see me next morning ? Into whose hands has it fallen ? What was in it—what its purport ? She must have felt that she had something to say—something to explain, to put a colour upon.'

Questions like these were ever hovering in his mind, and as to whether he should write and tell her all he knew about it. Was it not the duty of a gentleman to do so ? But he would be certain to run out into bitter reproaches, which would be useless and absurd now, especially if the note was—as he always shrewdly suspected—one cancelling her lately-made engagement with him, that she might marry a man more suited to her mother's heart ; for Sir Ascot had twenty thousand per annum, and expectations of more.

Bah ! every word he had heard beyond that holly hedge had been burned into his heart as if with letters of fire.

Some men—especially with such ample means at their command—would have plunged into the maddest dissipation, under all the circumstances ; but not so Vere of Ours. He stuck to his regimental duties and the interior economy of his company, even to the neglect of others, which he ought

to have attended in his new capacity of country gentleman, at least, so said the good folks of Blankshire. He had never been before in such a state of genuine disgust with things in general. He did not go near Quincey Hall, for he felt that it was the scene of his latest weakness and folly ; he did not write to Kyrle Desborough, because he had no desire *then* to know his precise whereabouts, and because he was disappointed with his old friend and favourite comrade ; so he stuck to his sword and buff belt, and never omitted a duty, however trivial, till an illness, ending in fever, came upon him, and left him in the hands of Dr. Capsicum.

Whether Kyrle varied his cub-hunting with other sport more attractive ; whether *they* met by chance or as opportunity offered ; whether they corresponded by letter only, during this time, he never knew, and could only hope that they did not. Any way, the cub-hunting seemed to last long that season, and anon came fox-hunting in due time ; but a rumour—a very vague one—reached Sir Ayling that Desborough was residing in the vicinity of Winklestoke, and as luckily about that time Parliament met, he took his entire household to Portland Place, though, of course, fashionables do not usually return to town till Easter.

It might be coincidence, but, on the following day, Kyrle Desborough was seen mounted on his favourite hunter in the Row.

CHAPTER LI.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

INTO the months subsequent to the shooting party at Winklestoke, the visit to Quincey Hall and all that came of it, to Gertrude it seemed that there had been crowded a century of trouble, vexation, and sorrow ; and bitterly she now repented that she had permitted herself to accede to Rosamund's invitation, as her presence had been no protection to the latter, and her advice, as a monitress, of no value.

Could it be that any unpleasant story or rumour in connection with Kyrle Desborough and Rosamund had influenced

Vere—a sensitive man, as she knew—in his extraordinary bearing to herself? A hot and painful blush dyed the poor girl's delicate face at such a cruel suspicion, till she remembered that the flirtation was then but in its infancy.

By chance a knowledge of Vere's illness reached her, and added much of genuine sorrow to her perplexity. Still she did not connect it in any way with the idea of herself. The doctors, it would seem, averred that the seeds of the fever had been sown, or caught, by exposure during the military operations incident to the late affairs in the West Indies.

Maidenly pride and the rules of society precluded her from writing in the matter, and she had no one to write for her. The little lord, her brother, was still at Eton, and she had no desire—for obvious reasons—to put herself in communication with Kyrle Desborough, whom she saw in the parks and elsewhere at intervals.

When she first heard of his illness—an exaggerated account of course, as it came from Sophy Finch—much of her indignation died away in her gentle heart, and she longed intensely for sure tidings. More than that, she longed that her position and general surroundings would permit her to be a sister of charity or something of that kind, that she might nurse him, and, it might be, worm his secret from him, herself disguised, her face veiled and hidden perhaps, for she had read and heard of such things : but how was she to conceal her voice?

All unknowing that such nursing might not be in the lines at Shorncliffe Camp, she loved to let her mind dwell on this idea, and out of it to weave many a tender and romantic episode, for which *he* would not then have given her credit, until the utter unseemliness and inconsistency of such a measure forced itself upon her sadly at last. And then she laughed a little bitter laugh, all unsuited to lips so sweet and tender, when she thought of what Lady Templeton—cold, passive, and unimpressionable—would think of such wild loving dreams ; for wild indeed they were, when judged from the standpoint of the noble dowager at Ringwood Hall.

So the London season, as usual, stole rapidly on, and when driving in the Park with Rosamund, Gertrude always watched with a species of dread for the appearance of Desborough among the riders who went cantering to and fro amidst the jingle of a thousand bridles, and for the bright smiling start of her sister when she saw him.

At half-past six the Row was, as usual, fairly full, though not so crowded as before luncheon, and the Ring of course was far from empty ; and there in the hot summer afternoon—the evening of the working world—when the air was still and drowsy, the bees still droning from flower to flower, and the birds chirping, as it were, sleepily in the trees, when Ring and Row were gay with the wealthy and idle, when half the celebrities of London, members of both Houses, judges, plutocrats, Government officials, and guardsmen, were gliding in and out on horseback, to them and to the dense knot of critical equestrians usually gathered at the entrance of the Row, one of the leading attractions of the famous lounge was the advent of Lady Aldwinkle, who was deemed as lovely a woman—or girl rather—as any in London.

A little buzz always greeted the appearance of her well-appointed barouche, with its wigged coachman, and powdered footmen who stood like statues ; the silver harness glistening, the leather shining, the proud horses full-fleshed and spirited. Such ‘turns-out’ were there by the score ; but it was the soft face of the golden-haired girl, who reclined back among the soft cushions, as contrasted with the thin, long, but aristocratic visage of her lord and master, that caused a murmur as the carriage rolled slowly and noiselessly on its well-oiled wheels ; and who that saw her thus, or anywhere else, in the lap of ease, wealth, and luxury, would have thought that—like too many others there perhaps—she had a canker in her heart, ‘a worm i’ the bud,’ and that there was but one face for her in all that mighty throng, and that not the face of her husband ?

Desborough had ‘sent in his papers,’ as the phrase is ; he was out of the famous old ‘Eighth or King’s,’ and was a

wealthy idler about town now ; and as he was moving in 'her set' again, more than ever did Rosamund repine at the thought of the man to whom her remorseless mother had tied her. Yet poor Sir Ayling, in his attempts to be youthful, and to be able to attend his young wife watchfully in public, at the Opera, balls, Drawing-rooms, and garden-parties, felt himself somewhat of a slave ; for in most of these places his bugbear, his Frankenstein, his Old Man of the Sea, Kyrle Desborough, was sure to appear also, with his handsome well set-up and soldierly figure, his perfect toilet, and easy indifferent air.

Yet though in such public places the bearing of the latter and Lady Aldwinkle was perfectly circumspect, almost distant, to each other, there were many, and Sir Ayling among them, who did not believe in it ; for the world is desperately wicked, and the old baronet knew what an excellent actor he had himself been in times past.

'Kyrle, Kyrle !' often thought the girl. 'Oh, never more can come those happy times—for, with all their doubts, they were happy times—when it was no guilt to see, to hear, to dance and ride with him, and the days went by in dreams that he would love me—the dear old days at Ringwood Hall and Aldershot !'

And in her repining she thought, foolishly perhaps, that the diamonds of the Aldwinkles, the equipages and state by which she was surrounded, and to which she had always been accustomed, were all as nothing when compared with a humble home to be shared with Kyrle Desborough. How *coleur de rose* all life would then be !

Much of this was, no doubt, sophistry ; but the chances of Society or of Fate, which you will, did their worst for the luckless girl in thrusting her, even amidst the vast world of London, constantly into association with the only man she ever loved, and loved but too well.

Poor little Rosamund ! At what part of the bridge of Mirza was her pitfall ? At what point in the perilous career she was now pursuing was the fatal step from which there would be

no retrogression? When would she pass the fatal Rubicon that rolled between right and wrong, error and virtue?

Alas, for the devil's old game, opportunities! Certes, they were not wanting. There were the Horticultural fêtes, where the band of the Blues discoursed sweet music amid shady bowers and recesses; the sundry garden-parties, and water-parties on the lovely river that rippled in azure and gold between green willowed isles and stately woodlands; the perilous encounters in hushed and half-lit conservatories that opened off ballrooms; the crushes on staircases, and so forth;—all had their perils and chances, leading to a companionship—friendship it was *not*—that had not existed in the innocent past time she regretted.

To Rosamund, the occasional kindnesses of her husband—few and far between now—came to her as a species of reproach; while attempts to return them sat ill upon her, and seemed to her only as a greater treachery of the heart.

Sir Ayling half deemed, but most delusively, that his ancient and aristocratic name would serve as an ægis; but he began to suffer from the pangs of a suspicion that nothing would allay—pangs keener than might have stirred the heart or roused the hatred of a younger man; and despite his perfect breeding, ill-temper began to show itself at last.

‘Do not attempt to deceive me, madam,’ said he sternly on one occasion, when he had caught Kyrle shawling her with unusual solicitude; ‘your affected innocence is to me as disgusting as the fawning manner with which you would seek to flatter and delude me. Hah! I have not forgotten the past!’

‘The past, Sir Ayling?’ exclaimed Rosamund, drawing herself proudly up, for as yet she had committed no irretrievable error.

‘Yes, the past—the circumstances of our marriage, and the wiles of your match-making mother, with your steady aversion to me; your reluctance, which no love, no assiduity or kindness, seemed capable of conquering. What a deluded man I have been!’

From that moment Rosamund's domestic peace was gone. He had, in these vague words, declared war against her, and in the solitude of her own room she wept bitterly. Sir Ayling was vulgarly jealous at last, if we may use the phrase. He now took to scanning the 'agony column' of the *Times*, and there often saw mysterious and enigmatical advertisements that he racked his invention to unravel, and set his soul on fire, till Rosamund was terrified to see how invariably, when the morning papers—after being duly aired and cut by his valet—were laid before Sir Ayling, he turned greedily to *that* portion of the daily journal, and scanned it with a sardonic grin on his mouth, and his gold spectacles on his long, thin, aristocratic nose.

But Sir Ayling was wrong in that instance. Neither Rosamund nor Desborough would have dreamed of resorting to that mode of correspondence when so many others were open to them; and it was not until one fatal night, at a ball, that the growing mischief took any very tangible form.

Rosamund and Kyrle Desborough were not quite aware that microscopic eyes were upon them, that mischievous little whispers were already in circulation among 'kind' friends in Tyburnia and Belgravia; but of course the last to hear of such things were the persons most affected by them, and those who had an interest in their honour and fate; and though men are reluctant to move in such matters, Desborough was taken to task on the subject by Vere, whom some rumours had reached at Shorncliffe and given him much pain, though there had been an unaccountable coolness between him and his old friend of late. They met suddenly at the porch of the Senior.

'Hallo, Kyrle!'

'Vere, my boy—how goes it?'

And with the natural impulse of two frank fellows, who loved each other well, and had often shared the same hut and tent or bungalow, they warmly shook hands, and for a moment Vere forgot his annoyance at his friend's alleged intrigue.

'Been in town long, Vere?'

‘Only for two days.’

‘Seen the Templetons?’ asked Kyrle, after a pause.

‘No—and don’t mean to see them,’ was the curt reply. ‘I should rather have made that inquiry of *you*.’

Kyrle actually coloured, and then said, ‘What was that row about?’

‘Row? I don’t understand, Kyrle.’

‘That made you bolt from Winklestoke so unceremoniously.’

‘I would rather not speak about it—just now, at least,’ replied Vere, colouring in turn.

‘Ah, well, are you in town for long?’

‘I go back to-night to Shorncliffe.’

‘Awful hole!’

There was a little pause, during which the two friends eyed each other, and Vere said, ‘Think what you may, Kyrle, I am not “doing” the blighted being at Shorncliffe any more than I did anywhere else.’

‘Happy thought! I am glad to hear it.’

‘There is something else you may not be so glad to hear—that you have been too pointedly “going the pace,” as the whole mess-table say, with a certain lady in town.’

‘Stuff! You and all the mess know that I always fought shy of women—showed the white feather regularly.’

‘Once you did, my boy, but now you play with fire. Kyrle, be wary—Kyrle, be warned!’ urged Vere earnestly.

But Kyrle only laughed, scraped a match on one of the porch pillars, lit a cigar, and began to smoke vigorously.

‘Your conduct is bewildering to me and all your best friends,’ urged Vere again.

‘What possible interest can any one have in the matter? And now that I think of it again, yours has rather bewildered me. However, I don’t pretend to know precisely to what you refer,’ said Kyrle, a little doggedly; ‘but this I know, that by your sudden and unaccountable retreat that night you left the field open to Sir Ascot, and since then he has been making his inns, I have no doubt.’

‘Neither have I; and he is welcome to do so,’ replied Vere

through his clenched teeth ; 'and, after all, I don't think it matters much under the present circumstances.'

'To what do you allude?'

'Gertrude's engagement to Sir Ascot, and her forthcoming marriage when the season ends.'

'May I ask you who told you all this?' inquired Kyrle, with surprise.

'Toby Finch, when on guard the other day.'

'And what, or who, may be the astute Toby's authority for this little arrangement?'

'His sister.'

'How kind of *her*! Why, it is all "gup," as we used to say in India—gossip, if at all. He certainly dangles about her—nothing more, so far as I know.'

'And so far as I care to know,' said Vere bitterly.

'I should certainly have heard all about it first.'

'From whom—Lady Aldwinkle?'

'Well—perhaps.'

'You seem to be quite *en famille* with them all.'

'Not so much as you might be if you chose, Vere.'

'Well, ta-ta. I have to be at the Horse Guards in ten minutes, and here is a hansom.'

So they shook hands and parted, not to meet again till face to face in the midst of a great catastrophe.

Vere had spoken lightly, almost scornfully, to Desborough of Gertrude's alleged engagement to Sir Ascot ; and now he knew not how to receive the flat contradiction of the intelligence, whether with pleasure or indifference. The former he might, the latter he could never feel. She was nothing to him now—less than she had been at one time during his sojourn in Jamaica ; for had he not heard her repudiate her engagement with himself, and to that man, too? He knew not what to think now, as the cab bowled past Charing Cross ; and certainly his chance meeting with Kyrle caused him to make somewhat of a muddle of his business at the Horse Guards, as H.R.H. the F.M. commanding was not slow in informing him.

CHAPTER LII.

THE BALL.

WE have referred to a ball as the occasion on which a breach was openly made between Sir Ayling and Rosamund. She and Gertrude—her sisters were on a visit to her—arrayed in all their glory—and splendid indeed the girls looked when they left their rooms, radiant with youth, beauty, and gems, each with a light shawl over her snowy shoulders—met in the drawing-room to await the more mature Maud, who took longer in dressing, or ‘making up,’ as she would have termed it in any one else ; and Gertrude began to improve the occasion by one of her little lectures, under which Rosamund began to writhe impatiently now.

‘If Desborough is there to-night you will avoid him, of course ?’

‘Avoid—do you think I mean to *follow* him ;’ asked Rosamund petulantly, fanning herself as she stood under the gaselier, the light of which shone down on her, flushing her golden hair, her exquisite, yet unsatisfied face, and her richly-laced ball-dress.

‘Do not dance with him more than once, even if at all ; for people will talk, and are talking, I fear, of you both.’

‘Let them talk.’

‘Dearest, dearest, don’t say so !’

‘I *do*, Gerty,’ replied Rosamund, becoming defiant ; ‘what would you have me to say ?’

‘I would have you remember that you are the wife of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle.’

‘I am not likely to forget that unpleasant fact,’ said Rosamund, tapping the floor with her tiny foot, and taking a side glance at herself in the mirror above the fireplace ; ‘but he outrages me by his correspondence with—you know whom I mean.’

‘But you must not outrage yourself and the memory of your father.’

'True,' said the girl sadly. 'Oh, had poor papa lived, I should not have been to-night the victim that I am, and the subject of so many weary lectures. But who *can* the woman be that trifles with a man of his years?'

'Painful as your position is, I cannot remonstrate with Captain Desborough for so selfishly compromising you, and I have no longer the influence of Vere to ask,' added Gertrude, whose white bosom heaved painfully. 'Would to heaven,' she added, after a pause, 'that you had never discovered this secret!'

'What secret?—that Kyrle Desborough loves me?' she asked, with heightened colour.

'Can you quietly talk of such a thing?' said Gertrude, in a low voice, but with a startled expression; 'are you fallen so low? But he dare not—he dare not!'

'What then?' asked Rosamund, with that defiant air which was certainly new in her.

'Of this woman's existence.'

'Oh, as for that, I have seen her often enough since that awful day in St. George's Church.'

'Sir Ayling's errors, past or present, are no excuse for you.'

'Have no fear of me to-night, whoever may be there, Gerty; and have no fear of Kyrle Desborough—he is a gentleman.'

'Oh, my darling, I am full of anxiety for you.'

There was a time when Rosamund would, at words like these, have thrown her white arms round her sister's neck, and kissed her; on this occasion she made no reply, but leant back in an easy-chair, and fanned herself slowly while gazing into the embers with that far-away look in her sweet face which people always wear when their thoughts are in the clouds, and Sir Ayling suddenly entered, with his hat in his hand.

'So, so, Lady Aldwinkle,' said he, seeing that she was in full dress, 'you are still resolved on going to this ball?'

'Of course—I accepted,' replied Rosamund, looking up with an air of annoyance, for he never used her Christian name when he was in a bad humour.

‘Ah, and mean to go, though I shall be detained at the House till an hour too late for (‘me,’ he was about to say, but paused) ‘anything but to escort you home.’

‘Surely, Sir Ayling, Maud and Gertrude are going, as you see,’ said she, opening and shutting her fan impatiently.

‘Any one else that you know?’ he asked calmly.

‘Of course, ever so many.’

‘Is—is *that* man going?’

‘That man—who, Sir Ayling?’ asked Rosamund, with an ominous swelling in her white slender throat.

‘Captain Desborough.’

‘How should I know—or care?’ she replied, blushing alike at the question and the falsehood of her speech, while Gertrude stood by with a pained expression on her beautiful face. ‘Quit the House early if you can, and you shall see,’ she added, shrugging her snowy shoulders, and burying her pretty nose in her bouquet.

‘I cannot promise ; the sitting will be a late one, and my support is promised. If he should be, you will not dance with him, of course?’

‘Of course not, if you do not wish it. But wherein lies the harm?—we have been old friends ; but I shall certainly do as you desire.’

‘I thank you,’ said he, kissing her on the forehead ; and with a bow—grave rather than pleasant—to Gertrude, he withdrew, just as Maud with her long train swept into the room, and the carriage was announced. Rosamund clenched her small and delicately-gloved hands tightly, and with an effort restrained her tears.

Gentle and girlish though she was, the innate pride of Rosamund resented the new tone of dictation and system of tutelage that Sir Ayling adopted towards her, and but for her own secret sense of error she might have resented both angrily and haughtily ; but as it was she acquiesced quietly, and hoped to yield obedience, or not to be tempted to disobey. After all, it was not too much to forego a few dances, even with Kyrle Desborough, for the sake of peace, though Sir

Ayling might have remembered by his own old experience that a quiet conversation may prove much more mischievous than any amount of round dancing can ever be.

‘This sort of thing cannot last for ever,’ murmured the girl to herself, as the carriage rolled along Upper Brook Street ; ‘and I must content myself with the gleam of happiness and sunshine I have had. Heaven be praised for its mercy ! But how can I *name* heaven ?’

She shivered as if with cold, cowered and covered her face with her fan. This was the *first* time he had ever condescended to refer openly to his suspicions before a third party.

The ball in its splendour, with music, lights, gaiety and brilliance, was like any other of the season, so there is no use in describing it ; but it was on this occasion that, through a very simple episode, Rosamund disobeyed most flagrantly alike the fond advice of Gertrude and the commands of Sir Ayling. Sir Ascot, Bertie Lawntennison, solemn, big, and *blasé* Derinzy, and many other men of the best style were present ; but the staff-colonel contrived only to have his name on the card of Maud, as he dared not ask Gertrude ; and that of Rosamund was filled almost immediately.

Gertrude felt herself colour with vexation, when almost the first man who addressed her, and who joined them, was Kyrle Desborough. Though there were both anger and fear in her heart—fear for Rosamund, that lent a disdainful expression to her beautiful face—Gertrude could not help having a gentle and undefinable interest in him, for he had many pleasing and seductive ways, and moreover, was he not the friend, the comrade and brother-officer of Vere ? the sharer of many an episode of peril and toil, of joy and adventure ? and withal he was undeniably handsome and courtly in manner. A sense of all this, and the hope to save appearances, led her to accord to him more dances than perhaps she would otherwise have done.

Rosamund, to do her justice, resolved to act a part she did not feel, and while painfully conscious of Kyrle’s presence, to strive to please those who sought by sound advice to control

her wilful impulses ; while he, on the other hand, was beginning to see and feel the necessity for not giving scandal in a circle so prone to adopt it. When he approached her smilingly amid the hot, flushed, and bustling throng, and took up the card that dangled from her fan—

‘Don’t ask me yet a while, Kyrle,’ she whispered imploringly ; ‘we are remarked, and I promised—I will sit out a dance with you—for—for Sir Ayling is not here.’

He understood the situation, and all it implied.

‘We must have one turn, or the omission will be observed,’ he whispered in the same tone ; and initialing her card half way down the programme, turned away to dance with some one else, but his eyes and his heart followed her face and figure through the mazes of every dance.

When Desborough first found himself sliding insensibly from sympathy and friendship into pity and commiseration, and from the sweetness of honest companionship into an unwarrantable love for Rosamund, many a time he made a solemn vow that for her sake, and not for his own, he would avoid her and the terrible temptation, the intoxication, of her society, even as the tippler may vow to abstain from that which will end in his own destruction, yet returns to it by a power there is no controlling. He had striven to avert his thoughts from the girlish graceful form, the pleading saddened eyes, the matchless face, and the lips he had playfully dared to kiss on *that* night at Ringwood Hall. Ah, he remembered that kiss, when he thought she had forgotten it, and the devil suggested that what had been done once might easily be done again ; and so he had rapidly drifted—Kyrle Desborough, with all his pride and confidence, mockery and cynicism—towards the lee shore like a rudderless wreck.

‘Our dance, Lady Aldwinkle, I think—allow me,’ he whispered, when, after long and patient waiting, the desired time came ; and he bore her off from the somewhat mortified Lawntennison, after the little pretence of examining her card.

Flushed with many a dance, her nerves thrilling with the music, she looked radiantly beautiful and even happy. How

pure, clear, and bright her innocent eyes seemed ! Yet, as he gazed down into them, he could see his own face reflected in their pupils, as his arm went round her, and they swept into the circle of waltzers.

There could be no doubt about it but that Desborough, in this matter with Lady Aldwinkle—*éclat* apart, he was neither base enough, nor vain enough, to think of that—had lost his head, and was in that stage of love affair when a man feels restless, uneasy, and wretched if he fails to see his idol for a whole day ; and now that he did see her, a mad passionate longing to fold her in his arms and kiss her passionately rose in his heart. He knew that no tie save a legal one existed between the girl and her husband ; he had somehow discovered that she had a solid and secret source for discontent with Sir Ayling ; and the jealous fear took possession of his heart that if she ceased to care for himself she might attach herself to some one else—elope perhaps—who could foresee the end of this dangerous state of things ?

Rosamund, in the small, and yet in one sense important, circumstance of dancing with him, had disobeyed the grave injunctions of Sir Ayling. But the temptation was great—he was absent, detained at the House ; and neither Maud nor Gertrude would say aught of her transgression. And now, when panting and palpitating during a pause in the dance, she clung rather than rested on Kyrle's arm, her eyes, drawn by some irresistible impulse, wandered up to the music-gallery, and there, amid some of the household servants or other attendants, who occasionally peeped down at the dancers, she saw a pale-faced woman, whose dark eyes regarded her with stern and watchful interest for full a minute, and then she disappeared.

This was the episode referred to ; for the face was, as she afterwards told Gertrude, that of the inevitable ' Birdie '—she of the interview in the gardens, and many others.

' So, so,' thought Rosamund, as a deep sense of insult and degradation rose in her heart ; ' the lady of the Rhododendrons at Bayswater, she to whom the cheques are so freely

given, is actually a friend of the servants here ! I have two more dances on my programme, Kyrle, and they shall be yours,' she said aloud.

'Thanks, darling,' he whispered ; and away went their 'flying feet' again to the *Soldaten Lieder*, Rosamund looking, if possible, in her spirit of joy and defiance, more bright, more brilliant, and more *piquant* than ever.

Another and another followed, though the rooms were filled apparently to overflowing ; then, as Rosamund complained of the heat, what so natural as that he should lead her out to the screened and curtained balcony, where chairs and lounges were placed amid jardinières filled with the rarest exotics, and where through the openings might be seen the silver light of the now waning moon, and the Park with all its trees ?

Other couples were there ; but they were absorbed in each other, and conversed in low and confidential tones, and in whispers that were half love-making and often half mockery. And there in that balcony, with the strains of the band and the buzz of the crowded ball-room in their ears, much passed between these two that, but for the impulses to which they were subjected, and the general circumstances of which one was the victim, would never have been. A love for her husband might have saved the latter, but it did not, and could not, exist ; and how could Desborough fail to be swept away, when the girl looked up as he stooped over her chair, and talked to him as she did in a voice that reached his ear alone ?

'And in all the time of my idling, doubt, and absence you really loved me ?' said he, in reply to something she said.

'I was mad enough to do so then, when I failed to gain your attention—a humiliating confession, is it not ? And I am mad enough, or bad enough, to do so still, Kyrle, when such an emotion is forbidden to me. I felt great misery then, and, in one sense, I feel greater now, when I have bidden an eternal farewell to all the romance of youth, to all inheritance in the future !'

Her voice became broken, as if tears choked it, and she held her fan before her quivering face as she said, 'Kyrle,

Kyrle, we are going too far ; leave me, leave me, while there is yet time ! Your voice thrills me and tears my heart. Oh how shameful is this weakness that makes me struggle with myself and you !

But instead of obeying her, if indeed she wished him to do so, Kyrle made the matter worse.

‘ I love you now, Rosamund, as I marvel I did not do in that past time to which you refer,’ said he, in a low and very agitated voice, ‘ when I saw you day after day and week after week—love you as only a man of my years and experience can love. Forgive my studied past indifference, stupidity, what you will, darling. You know not, and never can know, the doubt and dread from which it sprang ; but what avails all this now ? you are no longer free, and are removed from me for ever !’

Kyrle felt that this was somewhat of a farrago, and paused, on which Rosamund said, ‘ I tried to be angry with you—to hate you even, and thus rouse my courage or proper pride, but failed. My sisters early discovered my secret, and Maud strove to bring me to my senses ; yet, oh, so unkindly, by taunts and mockery !’

‘ And Gertrude ?’

‘ So sweetly and so gently. But let us say no more of this, and take me to her, or our absence will be remarked.’

‘ But you will not forget—to-morrow ?’

She pressed her hand upon his own as a significant reply. And as she arose, smiling, to re-enter the ballroom on his arm, all trace of a conversation so exciting had passed from her face. But while all this had been occurring in the balcony, a confab in which they were concerned was in progress elsewhere.

Sir Ayling had been enabled to leave the House earlier than he had expected, and drove straight to the ball, but long after midnight. He was there, however, but for a few minutes only ; the crush was so great that he could get no further than the outer drawing-room door, from whence he could see, in the glittering distance, Rosamund sweeping past among

the waltzers with Kyrle Desborough, in defiance of all in junctions ; and while jammed there in the crowd—for a veritable crowd it was—he was compelled to overhear some remarks that—though no names were mentioned—were never meant for his ears, and these uttered by some reckless and heartless young fellows, among others Bertie Lawntennison, so recently the sharer of his hospitality at Winklestoke, and from whom the tender, wild, and wilful, but childlike beauty of Rosamund could gain no pity.

‘Her marriage-ring certainly hangs loosely on her finger,’ said one, twirling the spikey ends of a bandolined moustache ; ‘they all talk about her—the men do.’

‘Talk—why, they rave !’

‘And what does old January think about it ?’

‘He doesn’t know, of course ; but it’s only the penalty every old fool must pay who marries a young and pretty wife.’

‘Pretty—by Jove, she’s downright lovely ! But who is *he* ?’

‘A fellow belonging to the Eighth or King’s,’ volunteered Lawntennison ; ‘it is a fifty-mile-an-hour flirtation. They’ve been going in for all the round dances, and sitting out the square ones in the conservatory.’

This was not true ; but Sir Ayling felt himself perspiring with rage—yet he was compelled to hear another remark ere he could force his way down-stairs.

‘When her old Adonis shuffles off his mortal coil,’ said Lawntennison, ‘and, with his wig, false teeth, and waistbelt, goes to the “land of the leal,” as Shakespeare has it, I think—’

‘In *Twelfth and Twelfth*,’ said young De Tumpkins, who was cramming for Sandhurst. ‘Well——’

‘By Jove ! the widow won’t be long in supplying his place.’

With a maddening emotion of shame and ignominy, such as he had never felt before, Sir Ayling left the house unseen, and drove home in the highest wrath.

Sir Ascot saw the three sisters into the carriage ; and in ominous silence they drove home, just as the ruddy dawn began to peep in the east ; while Rosamund abandoned herself to reverie, and went deliberately through the whole of

that conversation on the balcony, and others that should never have been, and amid which Kyrle Desborough stood out clearly and alone ; and, unseen by her sisters, a soft bright smile spread over her face as she thought of them and of *to-morrow*—to-day it was now. And the stars were paling out, one by one, when the sleepy hall-porter admitted them ; and she kissed Maud and Gertrude ere they separated, and in another moment she was face to face with Sir Ayling, who was seated in his dressing-closet, clad in a rich *robe-de-chambre*, pale with the lateness of the hour, and with the wrath which he had been nursing ‘to keep it warm.’

‘Not in bed, Sir Ayling!’ said she timidly, yet half playfully, patting him on the shoulder. ‘Surely the House must have sat late?’

‘I was last at the ball, madam,’ he replied, rising and confronting her.

‘At the ball!’ she repeated, as her courage died ; ‘I did not see you.’

‘You were too busy—too much engaged in the conservatory, on the balcony, and so forth,’ said he, in a low voice, but one of concentrated fury, as he ground his false teeth.

‘I do not pretend to understand you, or the tone you adopt,’ replied Rosamund, cresting up a little.

‘So that man was there, after all!’

‘If you mean Captain Desborough——’

‘I *do* mean Captain Desborough.’

‘Please not to raise your voice—Parker awaits me in my room. I have no control over the invitations he may receive or accept,’ said Rosamund, unclasping the diamond bracelets from her slender wrists.

‘But you have control over your own actions, and, in defiance of my wishes, you danced with him.’

‘Could I refuse when he asked me, and saw that my card was not filled up?’

‘Not filled up! This is not usual with you, Lady Aldwinkle. But of course it was easy to keep a place for him.’

‘Sir Ayling, you are forgetting yourself.’

He snatched her card, which dangled from the end of her fan. (Why had she not destroyed it?) The hated initials of 'K. D.' were there for seven dances, four being beyond the programme; for she did not accord him one till late in the night. He tore it in pieces and trod upon it, and tossed her bouquet, diamond studded *bouquetier* and all, into the grate.

Then, maddened by the memory of the stinging and coarse remarks so freely uttered by those heedless young men among the crush, and conceiving them to be only a tithe of what people were saying about his household, he clenched his hand, and so miserably forgot himself that he struck her on the neck, where his signet-ring inflicted a severe bruise. Struck! The blow was given and beyond recall. All that pride of race, of birth, and position, in which she had been so solicitously trained, and which was to her, as to her sisters, a second nature, swelled up in the girl's heart at an insult apparently so inconceivable. Her snowy bosom heaved painfully, she became deadly pale, and her usually soft blue eyes flashed with fire through the tears that filled them; and for a minute this illuminated pair stood a little way apart, gazing at each other in silence.

'A blow! and I am the daughter of Reginald, Lord Templeton of Ringwood!' said the girl loftily. 'Sir, you forget yourself.'

'To-night you forgot yourself, and your position in life.'

'To-night I fully remembered it—thanks to you, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle,' said Rosamund scornfully.

'How—when?'

'When I saw among the household domestics the face of a friend of yours.'

'A friend of mine!'

'The lady who resides at the Rhododendrons, wherever they may be. But I wish you good morning—Parker awaits me.'

And with an expression in her sweet face all unwonted there—an expression in which scorn and shame, anger and sorrow, were singularly blended—she bowed and swept away

to her own room, more than ever resolved to keep an appointment with Desborough in the middle of the approaching day.

Her defiant air and statement perplexed Sir Ayling, who threw himself into an easy chair ; and there he remained in bitter thought long after sleepy Parker's weary fingers had accomplished the elaborate process of disrobing her mistress, who, the moment she was alone, cast herself on her bed in a passion of tears ; and after these passed away, Sir Ayling could hear how restlessly the unhappy girl tossed and turned on her pillow, and how, now and then, if she got a few minutes' uneasy doze, she moaned, and woke with a fright, as if startled.

Though jealous rage still rankled in his heart, Sir Ayling was too much of a gentleman not to feel much shame for what he had done. In all the years of a long life ; in all his flirtations, and the coldnesses, quarrels, or piques to which they gave rise ; in all the furies he had felt at women who had deceived, cajoled, or jilted him, never had he forgot himself so far as he had done now ; and he stole in to tender some apology.

But Rosamund was asleep, weary with dancing and heavy thoughts. Darkness had gone now, and the light of the golden morning stole through the curtained window on her face, from which all colour was gone, and she seemed pale and white as the waxen lily.

'How fair she is !' thought the old man ; 'fair, but not to me ! Fair and false, fair and false—oh, the old saw never fails ! I have seen my best days, and hers are yet to come—with that man—who can say ? who can say ? Fool that I have been !'

She sighed through her sleep, and muttered something, he knew not what ; but he had often heard her do so before, without regarding it much. He listened intently, with his ear near her parted lips, as a smile spread over her face, though she sighed deeply. After this no words escaped her ; but as he stole away with a furious heart, he felt sure that she was not dreaming of himself.

CHAPTER LIII.

‘FOR EVERY OUNCE OF PLEASURE A POUND OF PAIN.’

‘WHERE is all this to end, and how—heaven help me ! how is it to end ?’ thought Rosamund, when, late next morning, Parker threw round her passive figure a blue-silk *robe-de-chambre*, and proceeded to brush out the silky masses of her golden hair, while the girl’s eyes were dreamily fixed upon the reflection of herself in the mirror : and a lovely reflection it was ; yet she saw it not, for even vanity was dead within her then.

In her eyes was the weary, hopeless, and dissatisfied expression which was becoming their normal one now, and told of a heart that had no comfort in it ; and all the while a horrible old-fashioned organ, of the dreariest tone, was grinding in the street without :

‘Oh, there is nothing half so sweet in life
As love’s young dream !’

It was not wonderful that such a dream should have come to her, after such a marriage as her mother had made for her ; nay, it had come before it, before Desborough left England for the West Indies. And this was the dream about which poets sang and painters painted, and of which uncounted novelists have written—the love implanted in our nature by God, and for which all save the sensible, the clear-headed, and of course the cold-blooded, deem the world well lost ! Suspicion keenly awakened, accusations almost bluntly made, and violence actually resorted to—what future could she have now, but to be the slave of an old man’s caprices—of one who was certain to become alternately exacting, tyrannical, slavishly maudlin, perhaps, or ridiculously uxorious, and all the while suspicious of every man who addressed her ?

She breakfasted in her own room—for of all that had transpired over night she did not intend to tell her sisters, not even affectionate Gertrude—and the moment the meal was over prepared resolutely to keep her appointment.

To do Sir Ayling justice, remembering what she had seen of the face that appeared in the music-gallery, he was not disinclined to make some amends for the affront he had put upon her in his dressing-closet ; but he also remembered the smile and the indistinct muttering in her sleep. So Jealousy came to his aid, and no *amende* was made, but the breach was widened.

And with a simple and cold 'Good-morning,' dressed for the street, she passed through the library, where he was seated at a table writing.

'The carriage has not been ordered,' said he, looking up. 'Are you going out—and on foot ?'

'Yes.'

'Whither ?'

'Am I a child, that I must account for every action, however trivial ?'

'If we are to judge from appearances, Lady Aldwinkle, the time has come when you must do so.'

'You shall know all—one day,' said she, making a violent effort to restrain her tears under her closely-tied veil.

'Speak now, if you please, madam,' said he, in a bitter tone of affected blandness. 'I do not understand all this, or the new style and bearing you have so suddenly adopted.'

'Understand this, Sir Ayling,' she replied, 'that daily I feel myself becoming less and less worthy of the small trust you confide in me.'

'Indeed !' said he, growing paler, if possible, than usual ; 'and to what, or *whom*, am I indebted for this circumstance ?'

Rosamund made no reply, but paused irresolutely near the door, while a tremor passed over her.

'To what is it owing that you have ceased to respect—you never loved—me ?'

'Perhaps it is owing to yourself.'

'To me ?'

'Yourself, and your secret friend,' replied Rosamund, who—though without an atom of jealousy in the matter, and though her pride was piqued—was not sorry, circumstanced

as she was then, to have this 'peg' to 'hang a grievance on.' 'Who is this woman, who makes a fool of herself with a man of your years !'

This was a sensitive point with the vain old man, and never before had Rosamund, or any one else, dared to taunt him with his age, and, coming from her, it stung him to the quick. She saw her advantage, and repeated.

'*Who* is this woman ?'

'One who might have been mistress of this house and of Winklestoke, had Fortune proved more kind,' was the startling reply.

'Perhaps if *I* had not come in the way ?'

'As you please, madam.'

'Enough, sir ; we will talk no more on a subject so unsavoury,' said Rosamund, bowing ; while he, with a hand that trembled with passion, resumed his writing, and she, with a scornful glance, swept from the room.

So ended the brief interview, which, however, left more sorrow than hatred or anger in the heart of either.

Rosamund avoided her sisters. Never had she done so before, especially with gentle Gertrude ; but she felt that there were duplicity, danger, and degradation in her proceedings, as she left the house, and hurried down the sunshiny street afoot, to the surprise of the stolid hall-porter, who had never seen his lady leave the house unattended before.

She looked at her watch, and went straight to the gardens in Park Square, entering by the gate near the wretched little bronze pedestrian statue of 'Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn,' while she knew that Kyrle, who also had a key, was to enter by a gate at another point.

She was pale as death beneath her veil, and trembled so violently that she seemed to totter rather than walk, and she sobbed violently when she met him. He, too, looked somewhat pale, as he bent his dark eyes tenderly and anxiously upon her. Regard, intimacy, passion—what you will—had ripened with frightful rapidity between this ill-omened pair.

Poor Rosamund was the weakest, in some respects. of all

the little birds that ever were fascinated by the eye of a serpent—not that brave, handsome, and in every instance in life, till *now*, honest Kyrle Desborough had aught of that in him ; but his eye had fascinated the trembler, and he had gone too far to recede. Was it that elective affinity or animal magnetism, about which so many prate ; or by what influence of love suddenly developed, read by eye from eye—by what power of intellect struggling against a more dominant will—was it that he had suddenly exercised all this influence over her, and that she had been so feeble as to forget all the world had given her, and for his sake ?

No one who saw these two pacing to and fro under the shady garden trees, to all appearance conversing so quietly, could have conceived the tumultuous passion that agitated the breasts of both.

For the first time in her life there was in Rosamund's mind an emotion of triumph and revenge in the fact of meeting Kyrle in the very place where she knew Sir Ayling had been wont to meet the unknown ; and when she showed him the livid mark of the blow on her delicate neck, while her eyes sparkled through their tears, Kyrle felt his blood run alternately hot and cold, and the margin of the fatal Rubicon seemed close at hand indeed. There are weak moments when a man is not master of himself, and with Kyrle Desborough this was one of them.

‘Tell me again and again,’ he said, in a low and passionate voice, ‘my darling—O my darling ! that the step we have resolved on does not terrify you.’

The step ! It meant that she had promised to leave Sir Ayling for life, and go away—away, where to it mattered not—with Kyrle Desborough. Incompatibility, difference of years, pique—it was not, we have said, jealousy—the blank in her existence, and the insult of the blow, with a terror of, and disgust for the future—had all brought about this terrible crisis on one hand, and his now passionate, yet undoubtedly selfish, love on the other ; for, as the stronger of the two, he ought to have resisted the infatuation to which they were giving way.

‘Speak, darling,’ he urged ; ‘you do not feel terrified?’

‘No,’ replied Rosamund, in a husky voice. ‘I have given you my promise, and—and—I shall abide by it.’

But as she spoke there came to memory the more solemn promise made elsewhere, and her heart seemed to die within her.

‘Are you happy, then?’

‘Not quite, Kyrle—even with you, and the knowledge that soon I shall be with you for ever.’

‘Until death do us part.’

‘O Kyrle, do not use those words now—here, at least,’ she pleaded, in a choking voice.

‘How you tremble, Rosamund!’ said he, caressing her hand, for none was near them just then.

‘I tremble, yet I do not shrink. You have my promise, and I shall keep it, wicked though it be—keep it or die! Oh, would that I could die now—die with my poor aching head on your breast!’

He regarded her soft pale face with great tenderness and passionate anxiety.

‘Mamma has made me what I am: she and Fate have brought me to this!’ wailed the girl in her heart, but her pallid lips uttered no sound.

Then, after a time, as if she still sought excuses to her own conscience, she spoke of the woman whose face she had seen last night, and who had crossed her path so often since the day in St. George’s Church; and, like herself, Kyrle Desborough seemed glad of having a grievance to grasp at and dilate upon.

‘There was a rumour—but perhaps I should not speak of it,’ he began, with hesitation.

‘A rumour of what?’

‘I heard it at the club,’ said he, pausing; ‘but the story would seem to have been revived after dying out long ago.’

‘Concerning whom?’

‘Sir Ayling. It was to the effect that he was once secretly married to a woman in humble life, and that she died before she could compel him to acknowledge her.’

Sooth to say, such is the weakness of human nature, that Desborough was not sorry at such a time to rehearse this perilous rumour, as a species of salve to his own conscience, which rather pricked him.

‘But she may not be dead ; and if alive, *what*, then, am I ?’ exclaimed Rosamund, as an area for terrible speculations was suddenly opened to her, though, considering the step in contemplation, they mattered little ; but, as one in a dream, she recalled the conversation she had overheard in that same garden between Sir Ayling and the unknown, when he bestowed the jewels upon her, and when she heard them openly canvassing her own marriage, admitting that they were dear to each other ; how, under her own eyes, he fondled ‘Birdie,’ and besought her to have confidence in him, though he ‘kept her existence unknown to all the world.’

The rumour, now mentioned for the first time by Desborough, fired Rosamund’s heart, to which anger and a keen sense of humiliation lent a surreptitious courage, with somewhat of a *soupeçon* of revenge ; so the poison worked rapidly, and the perilous plans they were forming were perfected but all too soon, and when next they met it was to be for a final flight. And, like a pair of guilty conspirators, they left the gardens as they had entered them, by separate gates.

In the delirium of this time—an epoch in his life to which Desborough in after years looked back with much of consternation and astonishment—he forgot her future and his own—forgot or cared not what the world, society, almost even his dearest friend Vere, might say or think.

In Rosamund he saw only a dazzling yet unhappy young creature, of whose loving nature, worth, and general attractiveness he had been so madly blind in the past time—an affection with which he had trifled, a woman whom he had lost, and whose beauty would do honour to any position in life. With her, too, in the blind desperation of their mad resolve, the painful and certain contingencies of the future were ignored, or committed to oblivion with the fact that, *the step* once taken, never again could they appear in ‘society’ together :

he might, but not she ; for that ordeal applies a different standard or moral code to the failures and defects of the sexes.

Kyrle only thought, if he thought at all, of dwelling with her and living for her alone in some secluded corner of Italy or Switzerland, in some Utopia unknown to the British tourist or Cook's couponist, if such a place there be, and where they could pass away their lives together in one sweet day-dream,

'The world forgetting, by the world forgot.'

What *then* would Rosamund be? A mockery to those among whom she now moved ; too many of them, though more highly born than herself, yet profligate in heart, the slaves of pleasure amid pretended purity, women destitute alike of sincerity and honour, yet dwelling in the lap of luxury and leading the lives of sybarites.

Rosamund was too impulsive, too much of a woman, not to be rather inclined to sacrifice herself for the man she loved, though she could scarcely hope that the sacrifice could bring her unalloyed joy in the future ; yet her present was so miserable as to inspire her with a species of vengeance against the world. The story related to her by Desborough might be all false ; and even if the woman lived, Sir Ayling dared not put her in her proper place after his public marriage with herself. No, no ; the idea was all too absurd and preposterous, and in the then whirl of her thoughts Rosamund soon ceased to think upon the subject, or perhaps to care about it at all. Would she yet live to learn the truth of the terrible axiom?—
'For every ounce of pleasure there is a pound of pain ; for every drop of milk, a sea of fire. The comedy is short, but the tragedy is long ; Iniquity soon plays its part, and then Vengeance leaps on the stage.'

CHAPTER LIV.

THE MISSING NOTE.

WHILE all this was being enacted in London, Vere in his hut at Shorncliffe Camp, was full of much anxious thought

on the subject of Kyrle Desborough and Lady Aldwinkle, though they had parted so jauntily, to all appearance, on the steps of the club. He could hear little of him but in the shape of perilous gossip, for Kyrle was so preoccupied that he seldom wrote to him, and when Vere tried to lure him down to visit the old corps, urging that surely he must be tired of town now, Kyrle wrote back, jocularly saying that he maintained with Johnson, the old bullying lexicographer (who believed in the Cock Lane ghost, but not in the earthquake at Lisbon), that 'he who is tired of London is tired of life, because in London we have all that life can require.'

Herbert Vere could not help having almost a brother's regard for Desborough ; they had been so long companions, and had, as the phrase is, 'knocked about' together so much, stood by each other in many a time of trouble and danger, and mutually 'done' many a bill ; for, with ample means, in an expensive regiment, both were sometimes a little necessitous. He was full of thought too for Rosamund, the whole circumstances of whose marriage were familiar to him. He had a sincere regard for the girl, as who that knew her had not ? and, from all he had heard, the fear of a horrible *fiasco*, which he had not the power of averting, haunted him.

Of Lady Templeton he never thought ; but he *did* much of Gertrude, nathless her apparent duplicity to himself. If money could avert it, he would freely have given thousands ; but here money, the usual panacea for everything under the sun, availed not. Often he assumed his pen to remonstrate or advise, but as often relinquished it, as he reflected by what right, beyond friendship, could he attempt to act monitor to Kyrle Desborough, his senior in years as well as in rank when with the Eighth or King's ? He was not the kinsman of Lady Aldwinkle, and in hot temper Desborough might tell him so ; and perhaps the whole affair was mere 'gup,' after all. Yet it went to his heart to hear Toby Finch, Prior, Clive, and other thoughtless young fellows—half boys—making a jest of it after mess, in the smoking-room or over the billiard-table—and certes, when talking of women, even of ladies, there is

not much chivalry in the youth of the present day ; and Vere thought how much that he heard at times would, in his father's days, have led to an exchange of shots at twelve paces.

Then, ever and anon, he thought with bitterness—or was it sorrow?—of Gertrude ; for the impression she had made upon him was too strong to be easily effaced.

‘ Yes, yes,’ he would mutter, ‘ it was like a woman, as Kyrle used to say, and despite his changed opinions of late, to employ every artifice to gain an honest fellow's heart—an honest fool's rather—and then throw him over when a wealthier match turned up, heedless of how it might embitter his whole existence.’

Then he would recall the assurances of Desborough that she was *not* engaged to Sir Ascot. If not, what then was the meaning of all that he had, either so fortunately or so miserably, been fated to overhear? Past times and memories, words and scenes, came back to him—a strangely tangled web of love and sorrow, pique and anger—all to give place, again and again, to the remembrance that she was no longer his, and never could be now. But then neither was she, so far as he could learn, the affianced of this new rival ; and anon, amid his perplexity and jealous disdain, there would come a wild craving to see her once more—a desire that scattered to the winds all reason dictated or wisdom resolved.

It was while he was in this mingled mood of mind that an event occurred which changed the whole face of affairs. In a corner of the overland trunk, into which he had thrust his dress clothes in hot and fiery haste, on the night he left Winklestoke in a tempest of disgust and wrath, his valet found a little pink note, which was handed to him one night as he left the mess hut. Frayed, crushed, and crumpled, it was the note of Gertrude—the note given to him by the butler at the dinner-table, which, of course, he could not read then, and had so mysteriously mislaid. He experienced a species of shock on seeing it now, and in tremulous haste he proceeded to peruse it :

‘ My dearest Herbert,’ it ran, ‘ I am really unable to leave

my room to-night, my head aches so, and I am *so* worried about the folly of Rosamund and your friend Captain Desborough, and have some dread of how Sir Ayling may comport himself—only he is too much of a courtly gentleman to compromise himself. In that matter I beseech you to use your influence, and remonstrate with Desborough, as I shall certainly do with Rosamund. Only think, Herbert—but I shall tell you all about it to-morrow—I had a proposal in the garden this evening from Sir Ascot, who would persist in his fear that I was engaged to that odious Derinzy. O my darling, he never once thought of you. Is it not a joke?—With a thousand kisses,

‘GERTRUDE.’

After gazing at it like one who had been stunned, again and again he read the note; and he now saw how singularly and skilfully he had misapplied all that he had overheard; and he cursed his fate for leading him to the spot where he had been compelled to overhear a conversation every word of which had been, as it were, burnt into his heart.

Thus were accounted for Gertrude’s laughing but persistent assertions of non-engagement to one who had no hope with her, and who formed an attachment to a girl beneath him in rank elsewhere. This was Derinzy with the keeper’s daughter; and all this, and much more, Vere had deemed applicable to himself.

‘What can she think of me but as a madman, or worse?’ he thought. ‘Oh, how am I to explain this cruel mistake—how seek pardon for the unpardonable insult I have put upon her and all her family by my own suspicious and impulsive folly? My darling, my darling, I have not an hour to lose!’

To see the colonel, late though the hour, was the resolution and practice of the instant. He got a month’s leave, and took the last train for town, acting with such haste and excitement as utterly to bewilder Toby Finch and others who saw him leave the camp. He travelled townwards, burning with impatience and dread that he might be too late to make

amends on the morrow, by laying his apologies, his pleadings, and his heart at the feet of Gertrude ; and again and again he rehearsed in fancy all that he had to say, all that he thought must take place at an interview so sweet and tender as it must be. And so he conned, muttered, and laughed to himself in a fashion that made it fortunate that he was alone, and had a compartment of the carriage to himself ; and he counted the stations as the train flew past them, all unwitting that ere the next day was done he would be taking the *down* train with scarcely greater impatience.

He was well aware of Gertrude's pride and spirit, and he trembled in apprehension of a cold, and perhaps final repulse. If she had in the past time thrust his heart back upon himself to a certain degree, he had terribly repaid her now. So fear of her innate pride was ever before him : would love conquer it ? She was so sweet and gentle that he could scarcely doubt it.

Yet he had put an unparalleled affront upon her ; and what view might not Lady Templeton, Maud, and others—even the playful Rosamund—have led her to take of the event ? In every way he considered and thought over the whole situation ; he experienced a mixture of anguish and shame that made his cheek burn and his heart to fail him. He had put a cutting insult for months past on a girl who, though highly born and gently bred, had no near kinsman to call him to account on this subject ; and even this conviction added greatly to his sense of regret and compunction. He felt conscious that he had allowed blind passion and jealousy to carry him away too far and too suddenly ; that he ought at least to have had the generosity to give her the benefit of a doubt or the chance of an explanation. He had done neither, but rushed away at once in a gust of wrath and suspicion, which the past teachings of Kyrle Desborough, in his cynical days, had no doubt done much to foster and confirm.

How would she look, how receive ?—if perhaps she received him at all ; for it was quite possible she might proudly,

and with justice, decline to do so. And as he pondered thus, her beautiful face, her appealing eyes of violet-blue, her wealth of dark-brown hair, her smile, her voice, her manner, and that great individuality which she possessed, and which was peculiarly her own, all came upbraidingly before him.

CHAPTER LV.

THE ALARM.

IT was a sunny, sultry afternoon, and Gertrude was seated alone in a little drawing-room or boudoir, Rosamund's peculiar sanctum, in Portland Place. It was the perfection of such a London apartment, though on a tiny scale—all silk hangings, muslin, porcelain, and *bijouterie*. A curtain festooned the doorway that led to the larger drawing-rooms ; there were fresh flowers in the fireplace ; a baby-like aquarium in one corner, with gold and silver fish shooting to and fro ; a little aviary in one of the windows ; and a silk-fringed mantelpiece, like the console-tables, littered with all manner of pretty nothings in Dresden ware and Chinese ivory.

The young mistress of the house had driven away to shop, accompanied by her husband—a most unusual circumstance. Maud was riding in the Park with Miss Derinzy and her brother the colonel, an arrangement of which Gertrude by no means approved, as that gallant officer had been struck off their visiting-list ; and she was, as she said, alone, and lost in reverie for the last new novel had dropped from her hand.

The evident unhappiness and moody pre-occupation of her favourite and once merry little sister were dwelling in her mind, and drew her away from her own special 'worry ;' so that times there were—and this was one of them—when she ceased to think of Vere, but of Rosamund alone. She was in this mood when a visitor was announced ; and as the hour was early for such an arrival, she looked up with surprise.

'SIR HERBERT VERE,
Eight or King's.'

Such was the name on the card presented to her.

'Vere—here—here ! what can he want or mean ?' was the thought that flashed upon her mind ; and for a moment she forgot, in her astonishment, her past indignation at his unexplained, and apparently unexplainable, conduct, and conceived she was about to faint, and by doing so humiliate herself for ever in her own opinion.

Then she found herself mechanically advancing to meet him, as he stood irresolute, hat in hand, saying some of the usual and inevitable commonplaces. What they were she knew not, and never could or cared to remember. A cloud was before her eyes, and out of it, as it were, seemed to come the voice of Vere. The latter was glad that she was alone ; but he had so schooled himself, that he was prepared to make his explanation and pleadings before any of her family—even to Sir Ayling, or to the august Lady Templeton herself, that mirror of aristocratic coldness.

Gertrude was a picture of a noble presence and a beautiful face ; yet confusion was the prevailing expression of the latter—a confusion blended with inquiry, wonder, and sorrow as he took her passive hand in his.

'I know not what to say to you, Gertrude,' said he, in a very faltering voice, 'or in what terms to explain, and to entreat your pardon for that which must have seemed to you the conduct of a madman.'

'Herbert !'

She uttered the name with difficulty, as she felt the potent spell of her lover's voice.

'Darling, you call me so again—after all, after all !'

'I do not understand all this,' said she wearily, and with something like a sob—a swelling at least—in her throat.

'I mean with reference to my sudden departure from Winklestoke, my absence and silence since then. Listen to me, Gertrude ; in a few words I can tell you all, though I may not hope for your pardon.'

Breathlessly, almost incoherently, in his haste and anxiety, he told her all that he had overheard, the mistake he had

made, and how he had, applying them to himself, adopted her references to the movements and character of another ; and the gust of blind jealousy, of sickening doubt and genuine sorrow, the whole episode had excited in his heart ; and she heard him with utter astonishment.

‘ Oh Herbert ! ’ she exclaimed, but in a low voice, and with her eyes full of upbraiding and of tears, as she sharply withdrew her hands from his clasp, ‘ how could you, how dared you, think so meanly of *me* ? ’

‘ Gertrude ! ’ said he appealingly, as he clasped his hands and regarded her eagerly.

‘ This is indeed a revelation ! ’ said she, casting her eyes upwards—‘ a strange proof of how low we may unwittingly fall, even in the eyes of those who love us.’

‘ Gertrude, I have endured much——’

‘ And think you that I have endured nothing—that my pride has not suffered, my love repined, and my sense of unexplained wrong been keen ? ’ she exclaimed, weeping freely now.

‘ But now that you know all you will forgive me, darling ? ’ said Vere, venturing to caress her. ‘ You once loved me so well——’

‘ And I love you still, though indeed you do not deserve it.’

‘ But you will forgive me ? ’ he urged again, taking fresh courage now.

‘ I fear that I must—I cannot help myself ; but, oh Vere ! never let doubt or mistrust mislead you so cruelly, so fatally again ! ’

She spoke gaspingly, and held up her white face. He kissed her, and, as his lips met hers, almost timidly, both coloured, they knew not why. Then, hand in hand, they sat together, and the explanation, the mistake, with all its consequent emotions, like the forgiveness therefrom, were gone over again and again, and dissected to the minutest particular. And Gertrude’s sorrow was soothed, even as her natural indignation melted, under the spell of Vere’s voice and the caressing expression of his handsome eyes ; and her heart, naturally

a warm and passionate, but better than all, an honest one, was throbbing with the purest pleasure. After a pause, that was not idly spent, however, Gertrude, while passing her hand caressingly over Vere's dark-brown hair, said, with a little spasmodic laugh :

'Is it not terrible to think that, but for the discovery of that little note, we might have gone on to the end of our lives without an explanation or reconciliation? It seems now too dreadful for contemplation !'

'And you might have married some one else, my own Gertrude !'

'Well, it would have been a just punishment to you Herbert. And you ?'

'I should have died an old bachelor, like my uncle Joseph, and been the last of the Veres of Quincey Hall. I am sure that I should, darling ; for after loving you I could love no one else.'

And we are certain that Vere felt this to be the case then ; all the more that his heart was as sore with remorse and compunction as it had previously been with jealousy, anger, and wounded self-esteem. The cloud that had enveloped them was dispersed now, and fortunately no unlucky visitor arrived to mar or interrupt their happy *tête-à-tête* ; for, full of themselves, their past, their present, and their future, they had a thousand things to say.

A ring of Vere's—the same identical diamond ring which, long ago, he had taken from his dressing case at Aldershot Camp for the same purpose—was now transferred to the engaged finger of Gertrude, who regarded it with a fond bright smile, as the most valuable, or valued, of her jewels ; and tenderly he kissed her white hand as he slipped it on, and felt something of prayer in his soul as he pressed her to his heart, with the conviction that now she was really his own—his own after all !

Nor could he help for a moment reflecting deeply over the singular chances, circumstances—which you will—that occur in the course of human life, and which may—nay, too often

do—change the whole current of it, for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy ; and also the mysterious influences we may unwittingly exercise over the fate of each other. So true is the now hackneyed quotation :

‘Oh, many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the archer never meant ;
And many a word, at random spoken,
May soothe or wound a heart that’s broken.’

And the same thoughts were occurring to Gertrude, as she regarded Vere with her bright smile—the long and tender smile of love and a secret understanding—in her soft dark eyes—a smile impossible to describe, while, as she laughingly told him, ‘joy gave her a very lumpy sensation in her throat.’

It was only but a short time before all this that Maud, as she departed, whip in hand, and in her riding habit, had said to her mockingly, and with direct reference to Vere :

‘You are surely learning to know what utter humbugs men are—how immeasurable and incomprehensible their conceit—yes, and deceit !’

Could Maud have peeped in and seen them now !

After a time, Gertrude said, in a low voice, while colouring deeply : ‘There is one matter to which I referred, in the note you so unfortunately mislaid, Herbert, concerning your friend, Captain Desborough, on which I should wish to speak with you.’

‘With reference to—to Lady Aldwinkle,’ replied Vere, seeing that she paused and an expression of pain crossed her face.

‘Have *you* heard their names mentioned ?’

‘Of course, dearest Gertrude,’ he replied, with a tone of sadness and annoyance.

‘But—but I mean together ?’

‘Yes ; at Shorncliffe : gossips—heedless young fellows *will* talk, you know.’

‘At Shorncliffe ! good heavens !’ exclaimed Gertrude, with a kind of sob in her voice.

‘You forget that Desborough was one of ours, and his name is still a household word at the mess. I have already spoken with him on the subject, earnestly and as a friend——’

‘Thanks, dear Herbert—thanks!’

‘But he made light of the whole affair, and stigmatised it as the veriest of shallow gossip; and from all I know of Kyrle, I cannot believe it to be more. *Now*, however, my darling, heaven be thanked, my position with Rosamund, as *your* sister, is entirely changed; Kyrle loves me well, I know, and I shall have influence enough, doubt it not, to make him cease to compromise her, as he seems to be doing now—whether in a spirit of idleness, folly or vanity, I know not—probably all the three.’

Vere spoke confidently, and he was reckoning without his host; but this assurance allayed the fears of Gertrude, and her face beamed again with sunny smiles. The hours of the summer afternoon stole drowsily on; full of themselves, their reunion, and their own communings, the lovers marked not how the time was passing, and that neither Lady Aldwinkle nor Sir Ayling had appeared.

Suddenly the loud shriek of a woman—Parker’s voice apparently, in the great staircase—followed by a mad ringing of many electric bells, resounded through the whole mansion, startling the usually stately and quiet household in Portland Place from its propriety; and from Vere’s encircling arm Gertrude started up, pale, terrified, and trembling, in anticipation of some dire catastrophe, she knew not of what!

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ELOPEMENT.

IT was in the morning of the same day when Herbert Vere paid his eventful visit to Portland Place, and an hour or two before it occurred, when Rosamund began to make preparations for her flight. ‘The quiet way in which the great

businesses of life are transacted by some people is marvellous,' says Holme Lee. 'I have found more noise and bother made about the ill-cooking of a family joint for dinner than over the fatal crisis which was the ruin of a life-time !'

Quietly and leisurely to all appearance Rosamund passed to her room, her heart beating wildly, and her temples throbbing ; and the servants who stood respectfully still as she passed, or who fell back before her, could little have guessed the wild tumult of thought that agitated her. With all her aversion for and doubt of her husband, and with all her mad love for Desborough, she *did* tremble at the step she was about to take, and even pondered whether it was not too late to retreat—to recall her fatal promise ; and looking at her jewelled watch—one of her wedding gifts—she knew that in three hours the inevitable time would arrive.

Then, as she thought again of her comfortless though splendid home and her loveless existence, her brain whirled, and despair, mingled with passion, coming to her assistance, left her open to the influence of her evil angel ; and in nervous haste she set about her packing, most scrupulously setting aside in her jewel-case all the family diamonds and every precious gift given to her by Sir Ayling. There lay a miniature of the late lord, her father ; but she dared not open the case, lest the face might seem to upbraid her. There too lay the once treasured flowers of a withered bouquet, given to her long ago by Desborough, which oddly enough, seemed very worthless now. She paused sometimes in the process of selecting what she deemed barely necessary ; and when all was packed, she still supposed there was something left undone, and stood dazed and bewildered, to think and weep, and press her cold little hands upon her burning forehead, and look wonderingly at her figure reflected in the opposite mirror, with all her rippling hair, seeming bright as the Fornarina of Raphael.

In a travelling portmanteau she put all she deemed requisite from amid the stores of her vast wardrobe. It left the house ostensibly for a charity, but in charge of Desbo-

rough's soldier-valet, who stolidly took it away in a cab ; and then she felt that the first stage of her terrible journey was fairly inaugurated. Opening her desk, she seated herself to write a last letter to her husband ; but often did her tremulous small hand, and eyes full of welling tears, fail her before she accomplished something like the following incoherent epistle :

‘When you read this, I shall be far away, and cannot hope but that you will do so with emotions of bitterness and hate for me. Despite the blow you gave me, I feel shame and sorrow for all I shall bring on you and yours—on mine and myself ; but I am not the mistress of my own actions. I loved Kyrle Desborough long before I married you—loved him, at first, almost without knowing it, deeming it then but the affection of a sister, though I often tried and prayed to shut it out of my heart. I never misled you into the idea that I loved you, whatever mamma may have said to deceive you—vanity or deceit was never mine. If you loved me once as I doubt not you did, I could not appreciate it. Oh, pardon me for saying so ; but perhaps some other—*one* you know of so well—may console you yet, when I am far, far away, I know not where, and, it may be, forgotten by all who love me now.

‘To remain with you would be but a life-long deception—an hypocrisy. To-morrow—nay, to-night—the Channel will roll between us ; so farewell for ever, and that God may bless you is still the last wish of

‘ROSAMUND.’

Then she added a little tender postscript, and enclosing the key of her jewel-case, folded, sealed, and addressed the note to Sir Ayling, placing it where she knew it was sure to be found.

‘If it should reach his hand before I am fairly gone—out of the house !’ she thought, with an emotion amounting to terror ; ‘but no—no one will be here till I am safe and away with Kyrle.’

Painfully agitated, she had paused again and again in her

writing, and entwined her delicate hands one within the other when her eye fell on her wedding ring. She felt that she was disgracing the noble name of an old and hitherto stainless race. How would her name figure in the future editions of Burke and Debrett? Would it be blotted for ever out of *Peerage* and *Baronetage* alike?

‘Rosamund, married to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, Bart., of Winklestoke’—and what next? How was the dissolution of that marriage to appear? So, with all the acuteness of persistent self-torture, she continued thus to question herself and already to canvass the future.

Her little dog fawned upon her, and her birds chirped at her approach; and she looked at them wistfully—who would caress one and feed the other, by that hour to-morrow?—and then she slowly quitted the room, as she fully believed, for ever.

Meanwhile Kyrle Desborough, in a very jubilant state of mind, was busy elsewhere, consulting the Continental *Bradshaw* for information concerning the Paris trains; at his bankers’ getting circular notes and letters of credit for a pretty heavy sum, as he was resolved that, come what might, no single luxury of all the many by which Rosamund was now surrounded should be wanting to her in the land of their adoption, though where it was to be finally he had not as yet the most remote idea.

Rosamund had ordered the carriage at two precisely, in pursuance of her plans, saying she wished to shop: but was rather put out by Sir Ayling announcing that he would accompany her, and, as there was an early meeting of the House, she might deposit him at Westminster, a quarter which was quite out of her calculations, and at a distance from the place of assignation. Ashamed, perhaps, of his recent gusts of jealous passion, more than all ashamed of the unmanly blow—altogether an unparalleled event in his life—for Sir Ayling was a true gentleman in bearing and breeding, and of a calibre unknown to the fashionable ‘cads,’ whose mockery had maddened him—he was more than usually suave to Rosa-

mund on this day, and she felt conscious of it, as he conducted her to the carriage.

The hall-porter, portly and purple-faced, quitted his leathern arm-chair to open the broad front door ; the two tall and carefully matched footmen, powdered and with canes, were there, one bearing a bouquet, the other a Maltese spaniel, as she and Sir Ayling quitted the house in state and drove away. As carriage after carriage rolled past them in the broad and magnificent thoroughfare, many of them coroneted, when the occupants thereof bowed and smiled to her, admiring the excellent taste of her costume and the brilliance of her fair beauty, she could not help thinking how these people would view the step she was about to take—how harshly she would be judged, and how ‘self-righteously’ the great mass of the undiscovered would condemn her, till she passed into oblivion and ceased to occupy their tongues. At a fashionable modiste’s in Regent Street the carriage pulled up, and Rosamund alighted.

‘You will not be long, I hope,’ said Sir Ayling.

‘Only a few minutes ; wait for me,’ replied Rosamund, in a breathless and husky tone, to the last words she was ever to hear her husband utter in this world ; and she disappeared into the maze, the throng, that filled the establishment.

Without making the pretence of even purchasing anything, in the deep preoccupation of her mind and the flurry of her thoughts, she passed out at another entrance the place had in Piccadilly just as a carriage drew up and a showy dowager alighted from it.

‘Lady Aldwinkle—and on foot !’ she exclaimed.

‘The carriage is at the other door,’ faltered Rosamund, drawing down her veil.

‘My at home day is Friday ; we shall expect to see you. Naughty thing ! what a stranger you have been !’ And Lady Lawtennison (for she was mother to the youth of that name) passed in.

‘Her at home ?’ thought Rosamund, as she hastened away ; ‘what will be said of me then and there ?’

In the street, a few yards off, Kyrle awaited her in a common cab. He hurried her in and drew up the windows, as she was in a passion of tears. Excitement failed to bear her up, and she lay sunk with her head on his shoulder, as the vehicle, whose driver had been well 'tipped' beforehand, tore through the Haymarket to Charing Cross. There the bustle, the clamour, the crowds of people, the piles of luggage of every sort and size, the barrows being rolled to and fro, the little wagons laden with flaring lamps, the clinking of hammers upon wheels, the banging and slamming of carriage-doors, the railway bookstall with all its many-coloured volumes, the flaming posters that everywhere met the eye—though each and all were familiar sights and sounds, to Rosamund, in that eventful hour, they all seemed a portion of some unreal phantasmagoria, in which she formed a stunned and bewildered unit; while she clung to Kyrle's strong arm as the only reliance which she had now in this changing and selfish world.

'Train for Dover—this way, sir; this way, ma'am. Here you are,' said the guard; 'this *is* the 2.50 train.'

'It reaches Dover—when?' asked Desborough, pressing his trembling companion's hand to his side.

'At 5.10, sir, sharp. Your luggage, with the lady's is in the van ahead.'

'We wish to be alone.'

'All right, captain,' replied the guard, with a knowing smile, while the necessary coin was deftly slipped into his apparently unconscious hand.

The carriage was chosen and the seats selected; but ere the door closed Rosamund was fated to experience her first shock. Bertie Lawntennison and another young fellow were smoking on the platform, and a lightning glance was exchanged between them.

'By Jove, there goes Desborough of the Eight, with a girl!' said one.

'Who is she?'

'What is she? Some little Oxford Street milliner, I

dare say. Sterner stuff has been vanquished by the prowess of the gallant Eighth before now.'

'She seems a good style of girl,' said Bertie, 'rather *petite*, perhaps. Close veiled—that is artful !'

Kyrle sharply closed the window ; but they passed and repassed it, till the guard put up an 'Engaged' label, when they shrugged their shoulders, laughed, and withdrew.

'It looks deuced like our friend Desborough levanting with somebody's luggage,' said Bertie Lawntennison. 'Somehow, I know the girl's figure. Who *can* she be ?'

Rosamund heard their idle laughter, and it stung her to the soul. But now the train glided out of the station, and swept across the broad bosom of the river, as Kyrle's arm went round her, and she nestled her tear-blurred face in his neck, and uttered disjointed remarks from time to time, while he strove to raise her spirits and make her smile.

'If I could only think that they would love me still !' she exclaimed.

'They, darling ?'

'Gertrude and mamma, when they know all.'

'Who could help loving you, Rosamund ?—my own Rosamund now !'

'By to-morrow—even to-night—they will have learned that I have given up everything for you—for you, Kyrle.'

After a pause she said, in a low voice. 'Let me but once appear before the world as your wife, Kyrle, and then—then all our doubts and sorrows will be over.'

'As my wife,' repeated Kyrle ; and while he pressed her to his heart, he was conscious of a half-perceptible shiver, as he thought of all the preliminaries ere that could be the case.

But amid the flush of his passion, the thought did not as yet occur to him, could he present to the world as his wife a *divorcée*, however beautiful, or however highly born, or must they live entirely in seclusion, and for each other alone ? 'There is a peculiar state of feeling,' says a writer, 'which a man sometimes experiences when he has bravely resisted some hydra-headed temptation to do anything pleasant, but

wrong, yet which circumstances appear determined to force upon him. He struggles against it boldly at first ; but as each victory serves only to lessen his own strength, while that of the enemy continues unimpaired, he begins to tell himself that it is useless to contend longer, and he yields at last from a mixed feeling of fatalism and irritation.'

But had Kyrle Desborough so struggled or resisted ere he threw the onus of his proceedings on Fate or the course of things in general? His own conscience said *no*; but he strove not to think of it, and abandoned himself to the joy of the time.

'Kyrle,' said the girl plaintively, 'in all the world, from this hour, I have no one to rely on save you ! My young life has been a wrecked one ; the waves of an inexorable Fate have closed round me ; and till we stand before the altar, and perhaps even after that, I shall feel myself hateful before men, and unholy to God !'

'Do not repine thus, my darling ; the fault has all been Lady Templeton's,' urged Kyrle.

'O mamma,' continued Rosamund, in the same strain, 'I may have done much to make you pity me, and you pitied me not ; but till *now* I have done nothing to make you blush for me.'

'In an hour from this we shall catch the Calais boat. Take heart, my love ; the morning will see us in France.'

The girl smiled ; but her loving heart was sore. She lay with her head on Kyrle's shoulder, and felt his arm caressingly around her. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the distant landscape ; but she neither saw it as it lay steeped in the red hazy light of the afternoon sun, nor the nearer objects, that seemed to be flying swiftly past ; for a terror now seized her, which she did not mention to Desborough. She was thinking, if not divorced (a horrible sound the word seemed to have)—cast off, dead in the eye of the law, and free to marry again—what would be her fate ? Sir Ayling might not take that course ; she had heard of such proceedings being ignored in a spirit of revenge. Kyrle could not then marry her ; and

if he should tire of her and her repining, weary of her presence, and grow heedless of her great love (she had heard that such things were inevitable), how more horrible would be her fate then !

But oh, no, no ; it would not, could not be ; and she thrust aside these bitter surmises, amid which the beautiful frankness of her usually merry and earnest eyes died out of their blue depth, and a kind of hungry hunted look came into them. Had she already begun to look the stern contingencies of the *future* in the face ? She knew all the stir and speculation to which her fatal step would give rise, of all that gossips and all that ‘society’ would say. How much bitterness, ridicule, malevolence, and laughter would be excited, and how little pity or mercy would be accorded !

But what mattered all these ? They could never reach her ears ; and she should leave all that, with the rolling sea, far behind her. She thought of her mother’s angry pride, her aristocratic horror and dismay ; but the idea of all these proved as nothing when compared with her genuine sorrow for the emotions of the gentle and loving Gertrude ; and at the thought of her, Rosamund’s tears fell fast and hot and bitter. A passionate longing to see her once again swelled up in her heart ; and it seemed difficult, with regard to that good sister, to realise the conviction that it was ‘all for love, or the world well lost,’ and that they might never meet again till that day when the great Dawn shall rise and the shadows flee away ! Would her photos fill the shop windows, now that she had become guilty, where they had never been seen when she was virtuous and innocent ? She could not doubt that horrible contingency, and that they would be, for criticism, in the hand of every fast fellow in town.

It has been said that the lives of human creatures advance only by steps along tracks that have been already trodden by thousands—yea by myriads—of mortal feet since Time was born.

‘It may be so,’ thought poor Rosamund ; ‘but comparatively few, happily, have had to tread the terrible path I am now

traversing—a path lit by desperation as much as love, and leading—whither? How nice it would be to die now, with my head on Kyrle's shoulder, and there would be an end of all! In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God. But I—I am not fit for heaven.'

So pondered the girl, but without the least idea of returning ere it was yet too late; while the swift express train flew inexorably on and on and on towards Dover. One ever-recurring idea was the memory of all the runaway wives of whom she had heard or read, in romance or reality—the fallen from place, from house and home, and the love of all save *one*, whose love soon died; and though her soul sank within her in dread and apprehension, yet she clung all the closer to Kyrle now, as her last hope and stay on earth. But of all these thoughts that coursed wildly through her busy little brain—thoughts which required his tenderest words and caresses to soothe—she gave him no indication of their existence, lest they should, not unnaturally, sound like doubt, regret, and even upbraiding.

And now the swift train, clanking, snorting, and screaming, went plunging down into the deep valley which is formed by an opening in the white chalky hills, and entered the kind of half amphitheatre where stands picturesque and historical Dover

'Courage, darling, courage,' whispered Kyrle Desborough, pressing her closer to him; 'a little time will find us beyond the sea in France.'

But it was fated to be otherwise. A heavy gale was blowing—a tempest, in fact; and the 'silver streak' was rolling in mountains of foam over every pier and jetty. Neither the Antwerp, the Calais, nor Ostend Belgian Government steam-packets could put to sea; so there was nothing for the two fugitives but to tarry in Dover for the night, to tarry in England, though, in the mad fever of her own heart Rosamund found relief only in swift locomotion.

'There is no chance of our crossing the Channel to-night,

my love,' said Kyrle, with a glance of inexpressible tenderness; 'but there can be no pursuit,' he added, laughing, to cheer her. 'At home they know not which way we have gone; and even if they did, the days of postchaises and of bribed postboys are past; so we can wait with patience for the morrow, Rosamund.'

'Weather very boisterous, sir,' said the head-waiter of the hotel to which they drove, very fussily; 'wind northerly, sea uncommon rough, the barometer falling, and all the steamers put back. At Folkestone, this morning, the tide rose to the wonderful height of twenty-two feet, sir, nigh to the top of the harbour basin; and here it is quite as bad. Chambermaid for the lady, sir; yes, sir.'

The evening was already and unnaturally darkening, fast into night apparently, before the proper time. From the windows of the stately and palatial hotel, in the grey haze that enveloped the Straits, not a visage of the French coast was visible; and Cape Grisnez, with its lighthouse, was blurred completely out. So there were Kyrle Desborough and Rosamund prisoners *pro tem.*, though in Dover, which has been justly termed 'the grand railway terminus for England in connection with all Europe.'

Rosamund's tears, we have said, were like April showers. Already, under the influence of strange places and faces, they were passing away. She knew that her letter must have been found by that time, and the secret of their flight known to her whole family circle at Portland Place and elsewhere. Yet already she was becoming content, if not quite happy, even hopeful, and was able to converse calmly with Desborough to reply by fond smiles to his tenderness and caresses, and to consult and canvass with him the route to be taken after reaching and leaving Paris—whether to Switzerland, the Austrian Tyrol, or the Lower Pyrenees, where surely, in some secluded village, they would be safe beyond the reach or ken of the obnoxious but too probably inevitable British tourist.

Even while they were considering these details for the

future, the wind and sea began to go down together ; and Desborough, though very well content to remain in Dover, began to have hope of the Calais boat putting to sea before midnight.

CHAPTER LVII.

A CATASTROPHE.

ON that day the House of Commons was not favoured with the presence of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle ; and the members who relied on his supporting some measure in hand were puzzled how to account for his absence, unless illness had supervened, while the lobbies, tea-room, library, etc., were searched for him in vain.

In the carriage at the shop-door in Regent Street, Sir Ayling waited for some time with tolerable patience till he began to think of his required attendance at Westminster.

‘ Why, she must be purchasing the entire stock,’ said the old gentleman querulously, as he glanced at his watch. ‘ Tompkins,’ said he to one of the matched footmen with the long canes, ‘ go in and see if Lady Aldwinkle is nearly done here.’

The man touched his gold-garnished hat and dived into the crowded shop, and after, some delay, his stolid visage again appeared at the carriage window.

‘ Been all over the premises, Sir Ayling ; Lady Aldwinkle is not there, and has been seen by no one.’

‘ Oh, impossible ! Open the door,’ said the baronet, with growing irritation and surprise.

Entering the shop, amid the maze of counters, customers, and assistants, male and female, he looked everywhere for Rosamund, and as vainly prosecuted his inquiries. On all hands he met with attention and respect ; and eventually the startling information was given to him that, more than half

an hour ago, Lady Aldwinkle had been seen to pass through the shop, enter a cab, and drive away.

‘Enter a cab and drive away! Where?’ he demanded, with absolute incredulity.

‘Can’t say, Sir Ayling. Home perhaps.’

‘Home in a cab, and the carriage at the door? There must be some mistake in all this. But thanks,’ he added, with a sickly smile, to hide the start he had received, the vague and undefinable suspicion of some great and impending evil or calamity; and even his stolid servants noted the extreme pallor of his face as he came forth, and seemed laboriously—and not with his little skip—to clamber into the carriage.

‘To Westminster, Sir Ayling?’ said the servant, touching his hat.

‘No—home, and quickly!’

The stately house was soon reached. Lady Aldwinkle had *not* returned, the hall-porter said.

‘Let the carriage wait,’ was the command of Sir Ayling, huskily given, for the mystery seemed thickening. That she might have left the shop by the wrong way in mistake or been taken ill never occurred to him; but a terrible suspicion of something led him to ascend to her rooms, as if there he should find some solution of the matter.

As he entered that chamber where her wardrobes stood, and which had witnessed her packing and final preparations, Parker approached him, and delivered a letter which she had found, addressed to him ‘in my lady’s hand,’ and which contained something hard and metallic.

‘Thanks; leave me,’ said he.

The room swam round him, as vague suspicions seemed to be fast becoming solid convictions. Parker retired, but, true to the curious instincts of her class, went no further than the corridor. She thought she should like to see *how* Sir Ayling looked after he had read the letter of his lady, and marvelled much why she should write to him at all. While his hands trembled and his eyes grew dim, he tore open the note—the farewell note—and read it rapidly down to the little hastily

added *postscript*, in which she again forgave him for the blow he had inflicted ; implored in child-like fashion his pardon for any errors of which she might have been guilty ; and prayed that God—of whom she trembled to think—might bless him and lengthen out his years, and even that he might get another wife more worthy of him than herself ; and again she bade him an eternal farewell in this world, adding that to Gertrude she was unable to write. He did not read the letter a second time ; there was no occasion to do so. He took in all its terrible and damning import at once, with the whole situation. That wife, the girl of whom he was so proud, whom he idolised, and on whom he had lavished so much, had fled him, a fugitive, and in the arms of another ! He crushed up the fatal note, reeled like a drunken man, and, clutching the marble mantelpiece, placed his throbbing brow upon its cold slab, and strove to unravel the whirl of thought that involved his brain.

Proud, aristocratic in all his ways and thoughts, proud of his family and the position it had ever held in English society, it was the dictum of that select circle of which he felt the dread and horror now, mingled with his real shame and grief. He seemed to see it all and hear it : the heartless gibes and scandal of the world, of London ; the mockery of the clubs at ‘ the old fool ’—mockeries in which he had joined with such genuine gusto in times past, when that befell others which had now befallen him, sorrow and dishonour.

He remembered the remarks he had heard on the staircase during the night of that fatal ball, with the mocking, stinging, and biting comparisons between his young wife’s beauty and his own veneered old age. The crushed letter and the jewel-case key dropped from his hand. One minute sufficed for him to take in the *sense* of the whole situation—that she had gone, gone and disgraced him for ever. Blindness came over him ; he made a wild clutch at the air, as a low cry escaped him ; and heavily he fell senseless with a crash upon the floor.

The watchful Parker heard the alarming sounds and rushed

in ; and, on finding him to all appearance dead, it was her loud scream and prompt application to the bell-handle which caused the alarm that roused Gertrude and Vere from their delicious *tête-à-tête*. Doctors were summoned in hot haste from all quarters, but life was pronounced to be extinct, and gone beyond the power of human recall. He had died of a shock of some kind ; the exact nature of it could not be ascertained without future examination ; but the action of the heart had suddenly ceased, and for ever.

It was very stunning, this event. Vere had seen men slain in the field by all manner of wounds ; he had seen them die in agony in the jungles—on board of a ship, and sunk to leeward with a shot at their heels ; but this shock, happening in a quiet and orderly London household, was so sudden and unexpected that it came with double force. He knew but little of the dead man, save as a courteous old gentleman and hospitable host with old-fashioned manners. Now he was gone. His chair and his place at table were vacant ; yet it seemed strangely impossible to separate him from all his surroundings, and feel that the door might open a thousand times, yet he would not enter ; that people would talk and talk the catastrophe threadbare.

Still more would they have talked had they known the contents of the crumpled note which Vere found, with the jewel-case key, lying near the dead man's right hand, and gave to Gertrude. Its contents—a clue to the whole event—filled her with blank horror and dismay. She remembered that occasion when, in her anger, Rosamund had stigmatised her marriage as a crime, the effects of which might recoil on those who brought it about ; and now the time seemed to have come.

‘O Herbert !’ exclaimed Gertrude, in a low but piercing voice, as her head fell on Vere's breast ; ‘thank heaven she has no children—no daughters to disgrace before the world !’

‘With such home-ties all this might never have been,’ said he. ‘But how could Desborough act thus, and with *your* sister ?’ he added, in growing indignation.

Gertrude remembered much that her proud cold mother and the stately Maud forgot—that Rosamund had been a victim to circumstances and family involvements, sold like the timber at Ringwood Hall, as the girl had often said herself ; that she had been, with all her high-breeding and loveliness, hoydenish rather than bold, and indiscreet rather than erring, until now ; a child always rather than a woman, even after her marriage ; a creature all-loving and full of impulses. So she felt more gentle pity than anger at the wild step she had taken. And now she grew painfully conscious that, but for that wretched misconception at Winklestoke, Vere's influence must too probably have prevented this most dreadful *fiasco*.

On saying something of this kind to him, amid her heavy tears. 'Cheer up, dearest Gertrude,' said he ; 'it may not yet be too late for me to exert my influence with Kyrle. Whither can they have gone ?'

'Her letter speaks of the Channel.'

'That would infer they were *en route* for France.'

'Or Belgium.'

'France it must be. They have gone by the tidal train, and I have not a moment to lose if I am to follow and stop this horror, ere it is too late.'

In another moment he had pressed her to his breast, and was speeding as fast as a hansom cab could take him towards Charing Cross.

Eloped, and with Rosamund ! To Vere it seemed incredible, as his memory reverted to all the caustic and cynical remarks Kyrle had made on that autumn evening—for it was autumn in England then—when they were together in Up Park Camp, when the news of her marriage came, and on many other occasions. And with all his dismay at the whole affair in which he was now involved, he felt a keen sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that he was serving Gertrude, obeying her behests, her entreaties or commands, and was already acting as one of the family at a crisis so perilous and deadly as this. She was without hope of his being successful. He knew not in what hotel to find them, or under what

name they might be travelling ; once in France, all trace of them would be lost, and the absence of Lady Aldwinkle at such a crisis could not be concealed, or unaccounted for, in two days hence.

All the speculation, the sneers, the shame and shadowy horrors which, with the bitter mortifications of her own future, the unfortunate Rosamund had already, within a few short hours, begun to form, rose like a dark column before Gertrude, and filled her with dismay and grief. It would be the ruin of their fair name, a blight upon their hearth and honour ; better it were, a thousand times, that Rosamund should be lying where her dead husband now lay, than living a living death, during which her name would never be uttered without sorrow and shame.

CHAPTER LVIII.

AT DOVER.

MEANWHILE the summer evening was being passed in mingled joy and excitement by the pair we left at Dover. They were to dine alone, *tête-à-tête*—the *table d'hôte* was of course to be scrupulously avoided—and Rosamund had come from her dressing-room charmingly but simply attired ; yet had she missed Parker's nimble fingers when dressing her luxuriant hair. For the first time in her life she had been without a personal attendant, nor would that want be supplied till they reached Paris—it might be Naples.

Heedless of the waiter—he was perhaps used to that sort of thing, and appeared to be stolidly laying the table—they stood in the deep recess of a bay window with arms entwined, looking at the raging storm—the subsidence of which Kyrle was hopefully predicting, in defiance of the barometer—and at the grand effect of the red gleams of sunshine on the tumultuous sea as they burst at times through the rents in the fast-flying clouds ; at the vessels scudding before the wind towards the Channel, and other features in the view ; and Desborough strove to interest her in all they saw. But

there are moments when we are alike indifferent to the wild or to the soft beauties of Nature ; for to admire and to observe them well, the head and the mind must be free.

‘The wind is evidently going down,’ said Desborough, ‘and I am sure, darling, the Calais boat will be able to leave about eleven to-night.’

‘The waiters do not think so.’

‘Of course not, nor is it their interest to do so.’

‘As you please, dearest Kyrle. It matters not where I am, when with you ; but—*don’t*, the man is looking.’

‘But for this confounded squall we should have been close in by Calais pier by this time. Do you like being on the sea?’

‘Not at night.’

‘But the voyage is a short one ; and then we are so anxious to reach Paris.’

After remaining silent for a few minutes, as if lost in thought, Rosamund suddenly said, ‘Oh, Kyrle, Kyrle ! can I be the same Rosamund who was in Portland Place this morning—the same Lady Aldwinkle who drove down Regent Street?’

‘Why so strange a question my darling, and why use that name here?’

‘Because I feel as if—as if—I know not how to express or describe it.’

‘What, love?’

‘As if I were two persons—*one* here with you ; another *there*, where I ought to be.’

‘My poor pet, this is a mere mental confusion. You are all with me, and are mine alone—my own at last, my very own.’ And he drew her caressingly close to him.

And while the frothy gray sea lashed and roared over the pier before the windows of the Lord Warden, as if it rose in especial fury to stay their further departure, and when, full of her own reactionary thoughts, Rosamund, though she did not quite shrink from Desborough, was inclined to repress his caresses, some thoughts began to occur to him of what his

old friend Vere would be certain to say of him now, and the hard names he would be sure to give him, and, perhaps more than all, to the partner of his flight, his future wife—and his bronzed cheeks burned scarlet.

They still lingered in the recess of the bay window, watching the tossing waves, communing in low affectionate tones from time to time, in total oblivion of the choice *entrées*, the chicken and lobster salad, the *pâtés* and iced champagne, that awaited them ; in fact, eating and drinking seemed, as yet, to be a forgotten part of their programme.

‘Sir, sir, these are private rooms!’ they suddenly heard the waiter saying at the door, in a tone of remonstrance.

‘Stand aside, fellow, or I shall knock you down!’ cried a familiar voice, in accents of authority, as the door was thrown open, and Vere entered with a flushed face and hat in hand.

‘Vere—you here!’ exclaimed Desborough, as he motioned to the perplexed waiter to retire.

‘I suppose I must apologise for this apparent intrusion ; but the errand on which I have come is imperative, and brooks no delay.’

There was a stern and sorrowful gravity in his face that was quite unusual, but they attributed it to the cause of their elopement. Anger spread over the dark features of Kyrle Desborough, as he was not inclined, especially at a time like this, to permit even his dearest friend to interfere with his actions, or adopt a tone of reprehension ; while shame and dismay were painfully visible in the pale downcast face and averted eyes of Rosamund, as she, automaton-like, held out her hand to him. Her lips were white and firmly pressed together, and in her heart she felt a sudden terror, she knew not of what precisely. She covered her face with her hands, and then looked up with eyes dim with tears.

‘To what are we indebted for this sudden—visit, Vere?’ asked Desborough.

‘To your own actions. How shameful, how cruel, how selfish and pitiless of you, to lure this mere girl from her home, her station, and her husband!’

'I may deserve all your reprobation, Vere, but I do not wish to have it hurled at me thus, and in her presence especially,' said Desborough, with growing hauteur and sternness. 'I know not by what right you mix yourself up in this matter, or how you came to know of our movements at all.'

'I have come here direct from Portland Place.'

'Sent after me by Sir Ayling?' asked Desborough, with something of scorn in his tone.

'Sent by Gertrude Templeton. Stricken down by this act, Sir Ayling is lying a corpse under his own roof, and his sudden death lies at your door! What! are you the same Kyrle Desborough that I followed up the breach at the Main Bastion, and through the Cashmere Gate at Delhi? Oh, Kyrle, Kyrle!'

Dead—old Sir Ayling dead! The listeners were thunder-struck; sorrow replaced the shame of Rosamund, and astonishment the hot anger into which Desborough had been carefully lashing himself.

'This sounds all incomprehensible. Explain yourself, Vere,' said he.

A very few words served to do so, and to paint the agony of mind in which he had left Gertrude; and as they listened the fugitives looked blankly in each other's face.

'Oh, Kyrle, Kyrle!—my God! he is dead! I have killed him! I have killed him!' exclaimed Rosamund.

'Poor old man!' said he reflectively, as he tugged each of his thick moustaches.

'Oh, what will become of me now!' exclaimed the girl again, as she covered her face with her hands; and a new and undefined terror—remorse, perhaps—took possession of her, and she shivered visibly when Desborough put his arm round her.

He felt conscious of this new emotion and the source from whence it sprang, and he gazed silently and anxiously down on the golden tresses of her bowed head, and the convulsed features of her white face—for a lover ever analyses every-

thing that proceeds from the object of his regard. Thus it is that, when with the object of his passion, if it be a true one the lover never wearies, but always finds something to observe in her looks, her motions, and most casual remarks ; and the slightest shade of dissatisfaction stole into the features of Desborough.

‘ Thank heaven, I have been in time !’ said Vere.

‘ But for the storm——’ began Desborough.

‘ You would have escaped me, and all would have been destruction then. But after what I have told you, you will surely both return with me to town ?’

Desborough was touched by the tone of entreaty so suddenly adopted by his old comrade, and pressed his hand as if in assent ; and knowing how Vere loved, or had loved, Gertrude Templeton, he now felt some sincere shame for the part he was playing.

Vere placed a hand caressingly on the head of Rosamund, and she clasped it between both of hers, as she said, ‘ Take me back ; take me back again, ere it is too late.’

Vere regarded her kindly and pityingly ; for he knew, but not to the full extent, how much she had been thrust on one hand, and allured on the other, to that stage in the path of virtue when the finger-post points to vice.

‘ How came you to follow us ?’ asked Kyrle.

‘ Gertrude sent me,’ replied Vere.

‘ Gertrude ?’ said Rosamund, looking up inquiringly.

‘ Yes. A little time will explain all that to you, and much more ; but we are not too late to catch the seven-thirty train, which will deposit us in town in three hours or less.’

‘ And how came you to trace us here ?’

‘ By the merest, but most fortunate, chance in the world, Kyrle. I met Tom Kenny of ours. You remember Tom, the marksman, who is now, poor fellow, a commissioner. He was right glad to see me, for the sake of the old Eighth, and told me that he had seen you and a lady enter this hotel ; and so I am here, though you gave the very uncommon name of Captain Smith.’

Though not loving Desborough less, a great horror of the calamity she had caused was apparent in Rosamund's face. Ashy pale, it became fixed in its abstraction. Her eyes were wide open, with a dreamy, wild, sleep-walking expression in them ; but under the sense of Vere's presence, protection, and advice she rallied a little, but a painful hectic flush at times gave place to the pallor of death, as it seemed.

With decision, prudence, and caution, yet all not the less inspired by love, Kyrle Desborough saw that now, since poor old Sir Ayling was dead, eloping was no longer a necessity, and, like the frozen, crushed, and terrified Rosamund, whom it was so difficult to regard in the light of a widow, he saw that the sooner she was back in her own house, the better for all parties, and more than all for herself. Hence to the friendly propositions of Vere he had not a word of opposition to offer ; and poor little Rosamund seemed to have no longer a will of her own, and to be disposed to cling to Vere as a sure guide and protector. Though the shock of Sir Ayling's sudden death appalled her and excited remorse, it could not cause grief.

She had never loved, and latterly had barely respected, him ; but now that he was dead—dead, poor old man—how difficult it was to think so !—she recalled with genuine sorrow, repentance, and compunction innumerable kindly acts, delicate, gentlemanly, and fatherly attentions, of which, in the whirlpool of her passion for Kyrle Desborough, she had been oblivious, and callously so, at the time. Even 'Birdie,' that fertile source of suspicion and mistrust, was forgotten now by Rosamund. Flying with Desborough, she felt herself like some wild and desperate creature, clinging to a strong and loving arm ; but now, by this catastrophe and the tossing waves, she was driven back upon herself, upon her own thoughts, and that horror from which she had fled—'society.'

Kyrle Desborough was not a fool ; hence he had no vanity : he was not, and never had been, a rake, either by name or nature ; and thus his heart too was full of honest and genuine shame, pity, and compunction—shame for himself, pity for

Rosamund, and compunction for the whole affair. So now he welcomed (a 'muff,' therefore, some fellows, such as Lawn-tennison, will call him) the intervention of Herbert Vere, which saved the name of the girl he loved from being compromised, and saved her and himself from the reprehension of the good, the wise, and the—untempted.

By one or two coincidences, and by Vere's promptitude, Rosamund knew, like Gertrude, of all that she had been saved from—the dreadful contingencies of the future; that the dreadful secret of what she intended to do was known to none out of their circle; and that he had saved the name, fame, and honour of herself and all her family. And now that the delirium—for such it was, in one sense—had passed away, she had a deep and fervent love for, and emotion of the purest gratitude to, the affianced of her sister.

And so that night, after all the wild and varying tumult of thought she had undergone, poor Rosamund came home weeping, pale, and full of great sorrow, to the house at Portland Place, which she seemed to have left ages, not hours, ago—the great house where the old man lay dead—and Rosamund, we say, went to sleep like a weary, grieved, and naughty child in the arms of Gertrude, with her cheek on the soft bosom of that dear sister, whose lips were pressed ever and anon on the golden hair of her she deemed a rescued one—rescued by Herbert Vere. The latter had driven directly home with her, dropping Kyrle *en route*; and the latter, in a very mingled mood of mind, spent at the club the night of his elopement.

CHAPTER LIX.

'ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.'

IT was with an emotion of great awe, and while clinging to the arm of Gertrude, that Rosamund next morning entered the stately bedchamber where Sir Ayling was laid out dead.

Though front to front with death, she dared not look on the pale face of the thin and rigid figure, the outline of which was so painfully distinct and suggestive, as it lay there with a white sheet reverently spread over it, in the room, which was half darkened and seemed full of ghostly and uncertain shadows, for all the blinds were down.

She, however, had no time to fashion her trembling lips or arrange her thoughts for prayer, or to indulge in any demonstration of sorrow or remorse, for the calamity her brief flight had, unconsciously, occasioned ; for her eye instantly caught the figure of a woman, who knelt at the foot of the bed, with her face buried thereon, and her hands, which were clasped, outstretched before her, as if in a paroxysm of grief. Her bonnet had dropped aside, and her hair was all in disorder.

She looked up as the sisters entered, and Rosamund instantly recognised 'Birdie.' Birdie there, and at such a time ! Her presence at once nerved and reassured the young widow, at whose approach she rose, calm and pale, with eyes all red and inflamed with weeping.

'You here, madam, *you* !' Rosamund said inquiringly, and not without some hauteur of manner.

'Yes,' replied the stranger, quietly but pointedly ; 'I did not desert him.'

Rosamund coloured painfully, but said :

'Why are you, of all persons, here ?'

'Why were *you* not here before me, Lady Aldwinkle ?'

'Yesterday—I was absent.'

'So it would appear,' said the other.

'But who and what are you ?' asked Gertrude now, with something of irritation.

'One whom he loved, and who loved him well,' replied the woman, who was very ladylike, and who wept profusely—'his unfortunate daughter.'

'Daughter !'

'Yes, madam.'

'Your mother—Sir Ayling never had any other wife than me !' exclaimed Rosamund,

'That I know, madam ; hence my unfortunate, obscure, and miserable life. Who my mother was can matter nothing to you, lady ; she has long been in her grave.'

So this was the secret so unwisely kept, and thus the cause of so much bitterness. She was double the age of Rosamund, and, in his senile vanity, poor old Sir Ayling had been loth to acknowledge her existence ; and hence the whole error which involved so much.

'And those meetings in the gardens?' said Rosamund.

'I am a governess, Lady Aldwinkle, and went there with the children, my pupils ; and there often my father, Sir Ayling, met me.'

'A governess?'

'Yes ; one whose life has been one of many bitter humiliations and few sweets,' said the woman sadly.

'Pardon my past abruptness, my rudeness—suspicions, said Rosamund, taking her hand.

'Suspicions, Lady Aldwinkle?'

'Yes ; I knew not who you were. How could I fathom a secret so sedulously kept? But, believe me, when I say it in presence of the dead, that your future life shall be my care.'

The poor thing looked at her wistfully, as if she longed now, at that moment, when both their hearts were softened, to kiss her dead father's girl-wife, but Rosamund was in no kissing mood. But she meant all she said, and more ; and in time to come 'Birdie,' secured by a competence for life, was rendered independent of all the miserable contingencies of teaching for a subsistence, a measure which Sir Ayling, with all his wealth, had been too selfish, or perhaps too heedless, to accomplish for her.

So in due time poor Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, the last of his old Saxon line, was duly borne to his tomb, in the deep old family vault under Winklestoke Church, shoulder-high, by eight servants in his own livery—among them the two tall matched footmen who had stood by the door when he and Rosamund passed out of the house together for the last time

—when they had taken the oaken coffin from the open car, which showed it, with all its mountings, and the piles of white flowers upon the lid, in bold relief amid the blackness.

Among these was a beautiful white cross sent by Kyrle Desborough, then self-exiled at Paris. It was in no spirit of hypocrisy that Kyrle sent this poor tribute of respect to lie on the coffin of the old man, whom he felt he had wronged, or sought to wrong ; and Vere of ours did not think so as he laid it on the lid, and held Rosamund's trembling hand clasped in his, as she stood by his side all robed in sable crape.

Desborough was too honourable and generous, infatuated though he had been, not to feel intense compunction for the whole share he had had in this deplorable affair ; but there it ended, for he could scarcely be expected to indulge in grief.

On that solemn day Rosamund seemed as one in a dream. She had a stunned and bewildered aspect, for a severe illness was coming upon her ; and when the grave and pompous rector of Winklestoke besought her to have comfort, as her good husband had been taken from earth to heaven, from corruptibility to incorruptibility, he might as well have said from Mile End to Mayfair, for all that she, poor girl, took in. All sounded unsatisfactory and vague, unless we except the threat—for such it sounded—that one day she should meet him again.

A serious attack of fever prostrated Rosamund. It was the result of what she had undergone for months past ; and all the world of the West End—at least the fashionable part thereof, and who knew nothing of the little trip to Dover—were edified to discover, through the medium of this illness, how much she loved and valued ‘her dear old hub, don't you know,’ and sorrowed for his sudden, though it could scarcely be deemed untimely, end. While Desborough lingered anxiously in Paris through all that illness—and it was a protracted one—Gertrude never left her sister's side. Hers was the gentle hand that smoothed the sufferer's pillow, that suc-

ceeded in achieving what no one else could do—that poured through the pale lips the first nourishment that restored strength ; and her eyes were the first to notice the favourable changes that announced returning health, when

‘Sideways her face reposed
On one white arm, and tenderly unclosed
By tenderest pressure a faint damask mouth,
To slumbering pout ;’

and to Gertrude’s loving eyes the girl, as she lay still and pale, looked like some exquisite image. Lady Templeton, of course, watched occasionally by her daughter’s bedside ; and cold and passionless though she was, she beheld the colour returning to her cheek with a joy that was not unmixed with hope and new ambitions.

Sir Ayling’s settlements had been, as she frequently declared, ‘princely ;’ and hence she had now high and mighty aspirations for the future of Rosamund, all unaware that the young lady, in marrying a second time, had quite made up her mind to please herself, after the hatchment, with its winkles and periwinkles *gules* and *or* quarterly, which had hung in Portland Place for many months, were taken down.

So, before the next year’s London season was quite ended, Sophy Finch had officiated, with others, as a bridesmaid at two marriages in St. George’s Church, within a short period of each other ; and there was every prospect of her figuring at a third. Whose marriages these two were we need scarcely say. Many officers of the Eighth—then lying at the Tower—were present at both ; and at one Vere’s entire company attended, each man bearing a bouquet of violets, to give *éclat* to the scene, and to the great delight and bewilderment of the mob.

The third, which was then undoubtedly in prospect, was that of Maud and big Jocelyn Derinzy, who had now become a viscount on the death of the old peer his grandfather.

‘How *la mère* Templeton brought it about is best known

to herself; but it beats cock-fighting, don't you know,' as Bertie Lawntennison said.

This she deemed her trump card; for the proud old woman was ambitious to the last. And Vere and Gertrude, when, on their wedding-tour in Italy, they saw the intended marriage announced in a fashionable print, laughed merrily as they thought of how many mistakes, *malheurs*, and mischances there had been in the past time, and how 'all's well that ends well.'

THE END.

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